

# INDIAN POLITICAL PARTIES AND IDEOLOGIES

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## Abbreviations

AICC	All India Congress Committee	DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AIKS	All India Kisan Sabha	EPW	Economic and Political Weekly
AISF	All India Students' Federation	INC	Indian National Congress
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress	INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
BKD			Working Committee
BLD			
CC			Parliament
CFD			Review
CI			ster
CPI			Swayamsevak
CPI(M)			Party
CPM			Socialist Party
CPI(M)			
CSP			
CWC			

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# FOREWORD

PEOPLE who want to build up a just and fraternal world are growing in number and commitment. They know that goodwill and dedication do not suffice. They recognize more and more the following requirements for their lives :

- a deep understanding of the complex problems of development and social justice and of the functioning of the world in which they live :
- a clear vision of the type of society they want to build ;
- a realistic plan of action, with proper strategies and tactics; and
- a suitable training and experience which will enable them to feel and think with the masses and to become true animators, community organizers, and grass-root political workers. However controversial and difficult these questions might be, they cannot be avoided any more.

The CSA (Centre for Social Action) was created in view of answering these urgent needs. Our aims are threefold:

—(i) **to make available relevant material on development and social justice.** In this respect, we will act as Editors of various booklets. Without necessarily agreeing with the detailed content of these publications, we will be responsible for the general orientation, thus seeing to the unity and coherence of the whole series.

—(ii) **to provide further encouragement, guidance and training to interested persons and groups.** We hope that our booklets will enable us to enter into deeper contact and collaborate with each other.

—(iii) **to help people rethink and reorientate their action to bring about social justice and true democratic socialism in India.** We shall take clear and firm stands on these issues whenever contemporary research makes it possible. We are also convinced—and we are sure our readers will share this view!—that mere words achieve very little. Our whole analysis is, therefore, action-oriented. Booklets nine to fifteen study possibilities of meaningful and realistic fields of involvement for social change in health care, law, development work, education, conscientization, mass organizations and politics.



These publications are not for experts or for people who are highly politicised. They provide non-technical, yet rather comprehensive introductions, for educated people who are still searching to deepen their reflection and action. Though sometimes dealing with relevant religious questions, these booklets are addressed to all, irrespective of creed and religion. Briefly, we want to help the general public to focus their attention on the main issues to be able to take a stand.

With the titles of the booklets on the back cover page, it is easy to grasp the plan of our study. In our series on "India's Search for Development and Social Justice", the first eight booklets analyse Indian Society. Such a study may appear somewhat theoretical and superfluous to some of our readers. We are, however, convinced that efficient action, even at the micro level, requires a scientific understanding of the society we live in. This is why we felt the need of insisting on this long-neglected topic. After describing the different development theories and the Indian situation in our two introductory booklets, we present our method of analysis in our third booklet. The following five booklets respectively deal with the recent historical background of India—the British Rule and the Independence Movement—, and the basic assumptions, policies and structural organisation of our country in the economic, social, political and culturo-religious fields. The second part, entitled "Towards a New India", begins with a description of the society we want to build and some general reflections on problems of strategies and tactics. It further provides guidelines for action for people involved in various fields.

So far only four books are foreseen in the second series. We are sure that it will be necessary to extend this list in the near future. Our intention is to reflect on various subjects which are relevant to the issues of development and social justice. We have selected four such topics guided by the needs they fulfil for our readers.

**The Editors**



## INTRODUCTION

India has just lived through the traumatic experience of 19 months of Emergency and the stunning victory of the Janata Party in the 1977 elections. Thirty years after Independence, the Indian masses have dethroned a power--thirsty and dictatorial government and have, once again, asserted their rights. After three decades of rule, the Indian National Congress is now weakened and divided, while most of the hitherto opposition parties are established in power under the Janata banner. And already the masses are becoming dissatisfied with their new rulers... This new political scene raises several questions about Indian politics. What is, for example, the respective future of the Congress, the Janata, and the Communist parties? Are we soon to witness a socio-economic revolution or a strengthening of vested interests? Have the forces of authoritarianism and dictatorship been definitely defeated or is democracy still at stake? What does the future keep in store for the citizens of our country? How can they, in the present circumstances, continue to build a truly democratic and socialist India?

To throw light on such questions, *this booklet surveys the history of all-India political parties and tries to assess their ideologies, programmes, strategies and tactics as well as their performance*. Since the fifth and sixth booklets of this series respectively deal with "Post-Independence Economic Policies" and "Castes and Social Classes", the present one will only refer to these socio-economic issues. We hope that this study of the main "Indian Political Parties and Ideologies", which is geared to *a proper understanding of today's situation*, will enable our readers to shoulder their responsibilities and to play an increasingly more relevant role in people's struggles.

It might be good, in this introduction, to highlight the main tasks of the government at the time of Independence and to outline the basic characteristics and problems of the first three decades of political life in free India.

In a coherent summary, Rajni Kothari describes the venture of Independent India as follows: "India started off with a considerable design for political development. It was a design that involved a mammoth undertaking to pursue simultaneously the goals of (1) *national integration* of an enormously intricate and diverse social structure, (2) *economic development* for raising the standards of living of a people whose income levels had remained stagnant, if not declined, for over a century,



(3) *social equality* in a society that for centuries had been based on the principle of inequality, and (4) *political democracy* in a culture that had valued authority based on status hierarchy and concentration of power in the hands of a small elite... It was a design that went against India's own tradition of an apolitical, parochially-structured, hierarchically-oriented, and essentially inequitable social order."<sup>1</sup>

It is also worth enumerating some characteristics of Indian politics.<sup>2</sup> The most important one has undoubtedly been *the dominance of the Congress* till 1967 and even, to a great extent, 1977; India is therefore often described as a "one-party state" or, at least, a "one-dominant-party system". This feature led to the creation of a powerful and Congress-oriented bureaucracy.<sup>3</sup> Indian politics was moreover marked by both the proliferation and weakness of the opposition parties and the pressure of power groups. *Divisive tendencies*—on the basis of castes, languages, regions and religions—*often asserted themselves, while personality conflicts, struggle for power and defection marred the political scene.*<sup>4</sup> In the last decade, these phenomena, along with manipulative politics and the influence of "big money", assumed such proportions that J. P. Narayan even spoke of the prevailing "culture of corruption".

Indian politics took shape against the background of *Hindu revivalism, renaissance and nationalism*, as well as that of *secularism and liberalism*. Kothari adds: "As the basic Indian conceptions of democracy, planning, mixed economy, socialistic pattern, self-reliance, and non-alignment developed and got widely accepted and repeated ad infinitum, there developed an ideological consensus that cut across party and factional divisions. This came to be called the left of centre consensus."<sup>5</sup>

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1. "Democratic Polity and Social Change in India. Crisis and opportunities", Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1976, p. 8. The italics are ours.
  2. See for example Misra (pp. 632-44), Morris-Jones (pp. 245-58), and H. K. Chhabra ("State Politics in India. A Study of Centre-State Relations", Surjeet Publications, Delhi, 1977, pp. 348-51 & 369-71).
  3. For details, see Bastiaan Wielenga ("Marxist Views on India in Historical Perspective", CISRS & CLS, Bangalore, 1976, pp. 149-50), Morris-Jones (pp. 215-7), and M. N. Srinivas ("Nation-Building in Independent India", Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 22). The bureaucracy was already very powerful under the British.
  4. Gupta speaks at length of political defections, communalism, language and regionalism in politics.
  5. *op. cit.*, p. 51.



In fact, *most political parties claim to be socialist<sup>6</sup> and are based more on personalities than on principles and ideologies.<sup>7</sup>* Both the Congress and Janata for example possess a centre, and a left and right wings. *The resort to direct mass action, the use of non-violent extra constitutional methods,<sup>8</sup> and the significant impact of charismatic persons* like Gandhi and J. P. Narayan, further characterize Indian politics. *Various forms of repression, such as the banning of political parties and preventive detention, were also made use of in the country.*

The above mentioned tasks and characteristics of Indian politics will become clearer as we proceed with our analysis. In the next chapters, we shall successively consider (I) the Indian National Congress, (II) the Janata Party and (III) the Communist Parties. We shall make our study in the light of our previous reflections on "the Political System", "Ideology and Approaches to Politics", "The Functions and Forms of State", and "Guidelines for Political Analysis".<sup>9</sup> *We shall therefore try to identify the interests represented by the various political parties as well as their exact purposes and ideologies.* This approach will enable us to determine what can be expected from each political party in the future and to reconsider our political options.

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6. On this, see Morris-Jones, pp. 256-8.

7. For details, see Chhabra, op. cit., pp. 348-51 & 370-1. The Congress (I) is an excellent example. This statement does not hold good for communist parties.

8. A study conducted in Baroda in 1972 for example reveals that 42% of the political activists of the six main parties approve strikes and gheraos as a legitimate form of political action (T. Pantham "Political Parties and Democratic Consensus", The Macmillan Company of India Ltd., Delhi, 1976, pp. 161-4).

9. John Desrochers, "Methods of Societal Analysis", the third booklet of this series, pp. 54-63.



# 1. THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

This chapter surveys the history of the INC under the following headings: "The Independence Struggle", "Jawaharlal Nehru", "Transition and Split", and "Indira Gandhi".<sup>1</sup> It also assesses, especially in the conclusion, the basic policies and nature of the INC and tries to foresee the future contributions to the country of the Singh-Chavan and Indira Congress parties. The whole chapter should be read against the background of the Congress' economic policies we have analysed in the "Post-Independence Economic Policies".

## The Independence Struggle<sup>2</sup>

In 1885, A. O. Hume, a retired British officer, brought about the merger of three provincial organizations—the Indian Association of Bengal, the Mahajan Sabha of Madras and the Bombay Presidency Association—and founded the INC. The British Viceroy encouraged this "'controlled' vehicle of protest for the Indians".<sup>3</sup> At first, the INC, led by the western-educated upper middle class and financed by the landowners, the princes and the big business, was almost exclusively concerned with the improvement of Indians working in the British administration.

In the 1890's, B. G. Tilak led the first popular movement in Maharashtra. The 1905 partition of Bengal by Curzon roused nationalistic feelings and attracted several lower middle class Indians, especially from Bengal and Bombay, into the INC. From that time onward, the Congress had a "moderate" as well as a "radical" wing, respectively led by G. K. Gokhale and Tilak.<sup>4</sup> In 1906, D. Naoroji placed self-government or swaraj as the goal of the INC; the demand for "dominion status" was officially put forward in 1908. While the

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1. For general presentations of the INC, see Morris-Jones (pp. 72-125), Chhabra (op. cit., pp. 351-3), Gupta (pp. 512-58), Hiro (pp. 70-89) and Singh & Rao (pp. 51-77).

2. See our fourth booklet on "British Rule and the Independence Movement". A. Appadurai also makes a succinct expose of this period ("Indian Political Thinking in the Twentieth Century from Naoroji to Nehru", Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1971, pp. XIXXXVI), while Misra studies it in great details.

3. Hiro, p. 70.

4. For details, see Misra, pp. 99-165.



"moderates" stood for the constitutional approach, B. C. Pal, Sri Aurobindo and Tilak advocated the direct method, namely the boycott of British goods and passive resistance. In response, the Britishers made various reforms and introduced an elective element in the legislature in 1892 and 1909; in 1917 and 1919, they promised "the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions"<sup>5</sup> and called for cooperation.

M. K. Gandhi, who returned from South Africa in 1915, emerged as a national figure when he led Indian peasants against European planters in North Bihar in 1917. Two years later, he organized satyagraha or passive resistance against the Rowaltt Bills, but withdrew the movement after the Amritsar massacre, where officers of the Government killed hundreds of innocent people. In 1920, Gandhi renewed his call for satyagraha and mass civil disobedience and received popular support in Gujarat, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. As Hiro rightly points out, "*this helped transform the Congress from being, essentially, a pressure body to being a mass party,*" – this is one of the greatest achievements of Gandhi—"and secured Gandhi the highest place in the party leadership."<sup>6</sup>

*The INC, to a great extent, found its goal, leader and method of action in the mass movement of 1920-21.* From that time onward, Gandhi more or less succeeded to unite the major economic and religious forces of the nation and to guide them, through various periods of collaboration and non-cooperation with the government, towards the attainment of swaraj.<sup>7</sup> In the process, Gandhi prevented the communists and other radical elements from taking the leadership—it even seems that he launched the satyagraha movement to "save" the country from communism<sup>8</sup>—and somewhat contained the use of violence. In the Congress, Gandhi also played a role of mediator between Patel and Nehru.

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5. British announcement of 1917, quoted by Appadurai, op. cit., p. XXI; for details, see pp. XX-XXI.

6. p. 71; the italics are ours. For details on this period, see Misra, pp. 175-88. Both Misra (p. 181) and Appadurai (p. XXIII) mention that certain Congress leaders opposed the non-cooperation movement.

7. Gandhi seems to have accepted this goal in 1920. After opposing it - and Nehru - in 1928, he supported it in 1929 in the context of his disappointment with the First Round Table Conference.

8. Misra, pp. 178-9.



It is worth mentioning here some of the landmarks of the independence struggle: the 1922 withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement which was turning violent; the boycott of the Round Table Conference summoned in London in 1929 (in protest against the refusal of drawing up a Dominion Constitution for India) and the launching of a new civil disobedience movement; the pact with Irwin in 1931 and the consequent participation in the second Round Table Conference, which ultimately led to the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935 and the establishment of indigenous Provincial governments after 1937; the growing disagreement with the Muslim League (founded in 1906) which bitterly complained against the Congress ministries in the provinces; the famous 1942 "Quit India" movement, suppressed by mass imprisonment; the failure of the Cabinet Mission appointed in 1946 to solve the Indian problem; and the final formula—the partition of India—worked out by Mountbatten in 1947. The Indian Independence Act of the same year finally granted political freedom to the country.

### Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-64)

The first sixteen years of Independence saw the almost complete dominance of the Congress. The early death of Gandhi (1948) and Patel (1950) left Nehru the uncontested leader of the party till he passed away in 1964. With his Brahmanic background, elitist English education and fabian socialism, *Nehru was more a class representative than a mere individual*. Let us therefore briefly consider the ideology, achievements and failures of the INC under Nehru.

From the very beginning, the INC faced a host of economic, social and political problems, and strived to promote national unity and western democracy in India. The savage riots that accompanied the partition cost the country an estimated 5,00,000 lives; Rs 619 million was also spent for the immediate relief and rehabilitation of the more than 7 million persons who poured in from West and East Pakistan.<sup>9</sup> Besides setting up the National Planning Commission (1950) and framing its economic policies, the INC had to tackle "the crisis that arose over the accession of Jammu and Kashmir, and Hyderabad, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, bringing the princes into the new polity",<sup>10</sup> the formation of States, the selection of

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9. A. N. Agarwal, "Indian Economy", Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1975, p. 24 and Morris-Jones, p. 74.

10. Srinivas, op. cit., p. 11, cf. pp. 9-14, and Morris-Jones, pp. 74-8.



a national language, etc. The Constitution of India was also adopted (26 Nov, 1949) and the country became a sovereign democratic republic (26 Jan, 1950). The first general elections were held in 1951-52.

In spite of these achievements, disquieting trends soon manifested themselves in the INC.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Gandhi would have liked the party to dissolve itself and become a Lok Sevak Sangh (Servants of the People Society). Kripalani resigned from the Congress Presidency in 1947 on the ground that he was neither consulted nor informed by Nehru. In 1950, in an open clash with Nehru, Patel got Dr. Rajendra Prasad and P. D. Tandon elected as respective Presidents of India and the Congress. After Patel's death, Nehru ousted Tandon and became Congress President himself. Disgruntled or expelled congressmen formed other political parties in the early 1950s. The power struggle moreover continued within the INC and corruption charges were made against various ministers. In spite of several AICC resolutions on party discipline, the situation kept worsening. In 1963, Kamaraj suggested that prominent leaders should relinquish their offices and go to the people to concentrate on organizational activities. The "Kamaraj Plan" was accepted by the CWC and Nehru used it to eliminate adversaries and strengthen his control over central and State leaders. The "Kamaraj axe" fell, among others, on Desai, Shastri, Jagjivan Ram, Gopala Reddy, Patil and Shrimali. Throughout these years, the credibility and popularity of the INC and of Nehru slowly diminished, especially after the Indian debacle at the hands of the Chinese troops in 1962.

Sankar Ghose excellently describes the ideological make-up of Nehru: "Nehru was influenced by all the modern trends and movements which have inspired and troubled the intelligentsia of modern India... *(He) sought to combine liberalism with egalitarianism, democracy and individual liberty with socialism and planning.*"<sup>12</sup> "It is this mixture of individualism and socialism in Nehru, and the faith in democracy as also in social and economic justice, that eventually made him adopt a pragmatic attitude towards socialism..."<sup>13</sup> "Nehru...did not become a champion of the dictatorship of proletariat, though he repeatedly stated that political democracy was doomed unless it could lead to the

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11. For details, see Gupta, pp. 513-20.

12. "Socialism and Communism...", p. 119. The italics are ours. The whole chapter, entitled "Nehru on Socialism", is worth reading (pp. 181-215.) See also the author's "Socialism, Democracy ..", pp. 320-55.

13. "Socialism and Communism...", p. 185. The italics are ours.



realization of socialism in the economic sphere"<sup>14</sup> "Being the head of a democratic republic, Nehru did not, and could not, adopt any violent or revolutionary means to achieve socialism — (He) was as much the product of socialism as of Western liberalism and Gandhism, and he never gave up his faith in democracy and his belief in the purity of the means."<sup>15</sup>

In his eclecticism, Nehru left unanswered several questions concerning the transition from capitalism to socialism: "What is 'the spirit that moves a nation to high endeavour' in the absence of an ideology? How do we evolve the socialist modes of production without a corresponding change in the character of the state? What are the dynamics by which a class society is transformed into a classless society? How do we turn over control of production from the capitalist class to the whole people? Can a socialist sector develop from a public sector which has not cut off its moorings in a capitalist economy? Can the socialist man emerge in a system in which the means of production are in large part in private hands?"<sup>16</sup> *Nehru's ideology matters much, for it became the heritage of the Congress.*

## Transition and Split (1964-69)

In 1964, the INC selected L. B. Shastri as PM of India, for he appeared meek, submissive, and inclined to share power. After his death in 1966, Indira Gandhi was preferred to Morarji Desai (355 votes to 169) for rather similar reasons.<sup>17</sup> From the very beginning, two groups—for and against Indira—began to emerge. In 1966, Indira devalued the rupee without consulting the Congress President, Kamaraj, and the two former Finance Ministers, Desai and Krishnamachari. The Bombay election committee, under S. K. Patil's influence, however rebuffed the PM by selecting S. G. Barve instead of her candidate, K. Menon, for the prestigious north-east Bombay seat. On account of the people's general disillusionment, the

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14. *ibid.*, p. 193.

15. *ibid.*, pp. 211-2.

16. M Singh, EPW, Special Number 1975, p. 1337. This article on "Jawaharlal Nehru and Economic Change" (pp. 1325-38) is highly enlightening. The same issue contains an interesting study by B. Chandra on "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Capitalist Class, 1936" (pp. 1307-24); the article deals with the most radical and "marxist" phase of Nehru's life (1933-6).

17. On this, see Gupta, pp. 520-21, and J. D. Sethi, "India's Static Power Structure", Vikas Publications, Delhi, 1969, pp. 29-39.



1967 elections seriously reduced the majority of the Congress in the Lok Sabha (from 361 to 282 seats); the party moreover retained its absolute majority in only 8 States.

These electoral reverses, along with the formation of the rival Bharatiya Kranti Dal (Indian Revolutionary Party) and the growing popularity of the CPM in some States, convinced many Congressmen of the need for more radical or leftist policies. And the rift between the two power-groups in the INC slowly widened.<sup>18</sup> Indira Gandhi, a member of the Congress Socialist Forum, was, once again preferred to the conservative Desai as PM. The CWC also adopted a ten-point-programme—a “policy of democratic socialism”—to be implemented by 1976.<sup>19</sup> At the 1967 AICC meeting, the Desai group favoured “social control of banks” instead of “nationalization”. When Desai announced, at the next CWC meeting, “social control” as the policy for the next two years, the Young Turk Chandrasekhar strongly criticized him. In 1969, the Congress President, S. Nijalingappa, made the CWC ask Indira to take action against Chandrasekhar. At the 1969 AICC meeting in Haryana, Nijalingappa and Indira clashed on economic issues. The conflict on bank nationalization became still sharper at the 1969 Bangalore AICC session, where the Young Turks’ “paper” in favour of radical economic policies and Indira’s famous “note” were discussed. When the Central Parliamentary Board approved Sanjiva Reddy as the Party nominee for the Presidency of India, Mrs. Gandhi left the meeting in anger.

Soon afterwards, Indira divested Desai of the Finance portfolio, accepted his resignation from the ministry and nationalized 14 major commercial banks. Through the well-orchestrated publicity of the All-India Radio, Indira gained much popular support for her “radical” and “socialist” policies. As Ranajit Roy rightly remarks, “Almost overnight, the political climate changed in her favour and she became the people’s heroine, who, they believed, wanted to do good to the people and curb the proprietary classes.”<sup>20</sup> Her opponents however accused her of collaborating with the CPI. Meanwhile, V. V. Giri had become a candidate for the Presidency of the country. Indira and her followers defended the “conscience” or “free vote” theory and Giri was finally elected by a small margin. In spite of the efforts of Y. B. Chavan and C. Subramaniam to bring about compromise and unity, the

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18. Gupta makes a detailed study of the Congress split (pp. 529-43).

19. For details, see Gupta (p. 529) and Hiro (p. 76).

20. Quoted by Hiro, p. 77. Though bank nationalization had been adopted by the INC in 1931 and mentioned in each of its election manifestoes since 1951, Indira had opposed it in 1966!



party finally split in November 1969 into Indira's ruling Congress—Congress(R)—and the "Syndicate", the opposition Congress—Congress(O). At that moment, Indira had the support of 441 of the 750 members of the AICC, 222 of the 283 Congress members of the Lok Sabha, and 114 of the 154 Congress members of the Rajya Sabha.

Political analysts discuss the reasons for the Congress split. Some emphasize personal and group ambition for power and/or lack of coordination between the governmental and organizational wings of the party.<sup>21</sup> For the split did not fall along clear-cut ideological lines: "There were probably only a few radicals on the Syndicate side but there were plenty of non-radicals on the PM's side";<sup>22</sup> and both factions adopted almost identical resolutions at their respective All-India meetings.<sup>23</sup> Other observers give a greater importance to ideological factors<sup>24</sup> and point out that the Congress split led to a certain polarization of political forces in the country, for the SWA and JS supported the Congress(O), and the leftists Indira Gandhi, on various issues such as the nationalization of banks and general insurance and the abolition of the princes' privileges. In any case, *later events showed that the split failed to radicalize the party and bring about a fundamental change in the nature of the Congress(R), while the Syndicate group progressively turned towards the right.*

### Indira Gandhi (1966-77)<sup>25</sup>

Indira Gandhi often spoke of her ideology and position in the political spectrum. Claiming to follow Nehru's policies,

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21. See for example Morris-Jones (p. 215), Gupta (pp. 541 & 555-6), and K. V. Varughese (in Chatterji (ed), pp. 7-10).

22. Morris-Jones, p. 215.

23. Gupta, pp. 538-41.

24. See for example Ghose, "Socialism, Democracy...", pp. 355-68. This section is entitled "Indira Gandhi and Socialism". In contrast to Hiro (pp. 78-82), Ghose minimizes the role of "strategies and tactics" in Indira's shift to the left.

25. Besides the books of Pandit, Sahgal, Nargolkar and Henderson-- given in the bibliography, the following books may be mentioned: R. Puri, "India, the Wasted Years 1969-75", Chetana Publications, Delhi, 1975; D. R. & K. Mankekar "Decline and Fall of Indira Gandhi"; Vision Books, Delhi, 1977; and K. Nayar, "The Judgement. Inside Story of the Emergency in India", Vikas Publishing House, 1977. "Emergency in India" (T. Driberg & S. J. Mohan, Manas Publications, 1975) presents Indira's version of the Emergency.



she declared in Sept. 1969: *"We are now broadly centrists, or rather left of the centre between the extreme left and the extreme right."*<sup>26</sup> In 1970, she added: "Some people say that I am a Communist, and that I want to lead the country to an ultra-left path. There are others who think that I am not sufficiently inclined to the left. Both are wrong. I am following the middle path."<sup>27</sup> Between 1969 and 1972, Indira often repeated that she was working for socialism in her "pragmatic" way.<sup>28</sup> *This "pragmatism" or shrewdness also made her slightly alter her political position.* In 1969 and the early 1970s, "we spoke of socialism", she declared, "because that was what went down well with the masses... I want to take the wind out of the sails of the communists, and I can do that only by moving to the left of the centre."<sup>29</sup> After her spectacular electoral successes, Indira however disbanded, in 1973, both the right-of-centre Nehru Study Forum and the left-of-centre Congress Forum for Socialist Action and went back to a more centrist position, where she truly seems to belong.

After the 1969 split, the minority government of Indira depended on the support of other parties, especially the CPI and CPM with their 43 votes. After approval in the Lok Sabha (339 to 154 votes), the amendment to abolish the privileges granted to the princes by Articles 291 and 363 of the Constitution, was defeated in the Rajya Sabha by a single vote. When, in Dec. 1970, the Supreme Court declared illegal the derecognition of the princes by a Presidential Order, Indira Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha and asked for early elections. The time was well chosen. The harvest had indeed been good and the prices were more or less under control. The people had also grown dissatisfied with the performance of unstable and poorly knit coalition governments in Kerala, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Punjab, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana.<sup>30</sup> The Indira Congress emphasized the instability of the four-party alliance - Congress(O),

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26. Quoted by Varughese, in Chatterji (ed), p. 9.

27. Quoted by Hiro, p. 79.

28. *ibid.*, p. 81.

29. Quoted *ibid.*, pp. 70 & 76.

30. For details on "coalition politics", see Gupta, pp. 321-73, and Chatterji (ed), especially pp. 127-48. Gupta writes: "All types of parties--the rightists, the leftists and the centrists--joined hands, forgot their broad differences, made compromises, did a lot of horse-trading, and agreed, in many cases, on nothing except to form the Ministry" (p. 372). The post-election period therefore witnessed several tensions between the Centre and the States, many political defections and, in several States, President's Rule.



SSP, SWA and JS—and the negative character of its programme of “Indira Hatao” (Remove Indira). Taking full advantage of the question of the princes’ privileges, it moreover succeeded to project a radical and socialist image with its campaign of “Garibi Hatao” (Remove Poverty). The Party also received large sums of money from businessmen and industrialists—an indication of its brand of socialism!—and made extensive use of the government machinery for its benefit. The Indira Congress thus won 350 of the 515 Lok Sabha seats and reduced the share of the Syndicate from 61 to 16 seats.

After the elections, the Indira government nationalized general insurance and “introduced in parliament measures for the amendment of the Constitution in order to delete the right of property, to abolish privy purses, and to provide that the courts would not be able to question the amount of compensation that parliament may decide to pay for the compulsory acquisition of property.”<sup>31</sup> These policies, along with the popularity of Indira Gandhi after the triumph over Pakistan and the creation of Bangla Desh, further enabled the party to sweep the polls in the 1972 State elections and to gain more than 70% of the seats. This was Indira’s “finest hour”.<sup>32</sup>

*The 1971 and 1972 resounding victories of the Indira Congress can be interpreted as a “massive mandate for change”.*<sup>33</sup> The elections were indeed fought as a kind of referendum on basic policies: “The party pledged to amend the Constitution ‘to overcome the impediments in the path of social justice’; prevent undue concentration of wealth and economic power; introduce a ‘positive programme of agrarian reforms’; impose limitations on urban property; end anachronistic privileges such as privy purse; open up new avenues of employment; undertake large-scale housing programmes and slum clearance; protect the rights, interests and cultural traditions of the minorities in consonance with the secular spirit of the Constitution...”.<sup>34</sup> *The results conclusively showed that the Indian masses wanted a strong and stable government to fight poverty and reduce inequalities. If necessary, the Constitution had to be amended!*

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31. Ghose, “Socialism, Democracy...”, p. 364.

32. The expression is taken from Pandit, p. 86.

33. On this, see Chatterji (ed), pp. 22-5.

34. *ibid.*, p. 17.



In spite of a few progressive measures, the implementation failed to match the promises. The poor harvest of 1972-73 — along with the subsequent wheat take-over and the grain crisis of 1973 — and the sharp increase of prices between 1973 and 1975, created much dissatisfaction among the people. Corruption continued to prevail in government circles. Large groups of peasants and workers as well as of students and intellectuals grew critical and restless and resorted to various forms of agitation. The people's disillusionment expressed itself in the Gujarat struggle and, especially, in the Bihar movement which gained ground and somewhat threatened the government. *Ultimately, the proclamation of the Emergency has its roots in this deepening economic crisis and its political consequences:* "The Emergency is not an isolated event. It was the Congress Party's brute response when it became aware of its inability to cope with the rising discontent of the people against a government which, despite 30 years of rule and strong parliamentary majority, was not able to solve the basic problems of mass poverty, glaring inequalities, growing unemployment and rising prices."<sup>35</sup>

*In response to popular discontent* and by temperament —, *Indira Gandhi had moved towards authoritarianism and dictatorship long before the Emergency.* As early as July 1972, J.P. Narayan denounced "the danger of authoritarianism" and the "concentration of power not only in the hands of one party but in the hands of one person."<sup>36</sup> The CPM also often deplored the same trends between 1972 and 1975.<sup>37</sup> And Ajit Roy even published a well documented study on this subject.<sup>38</sup> He observed, among other things, the "process of the accretion of power to the top bureaucracy at the expense of Parliament and the judiciary" and the "parallel process of a devaluation of the Congress party which has now been reduced to a rubber stamp."<sup>39</sup> Some of Roy's conclusions read as follows: "Civil liberties are being drastically cut, police functions and personnel growing fast, prison regime brutalised and laws

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35. "Why the Ruling Congress Should be Voted Out", in MR vol X, 1977, p. 295; cf. "Post-Independence Economic Policies", pp. 87-8.

36. Quoted by Nargolkar, in "JP Vindicated I", p. 17, cf. pp. 17-25.

37. A. K. Gopalan, quoted by K. Nayar, p. 67.

38. "Political Power in India. Nature and Trends", Naya Prokash, Calcutta, 1975. It is worth mentioning here some chapter titles: "Towards Limited Dictatorship", "Lengthening Shadow of Police Raj", "Brutalized Prison", "Attack on the Press", "Strongarm Brigades", "Rigging of Polls", "Power-With Mask Off" (the Railway Strike).

39. *ibid.*, p. 51.



openly flouted by the various law-enforcing organs... Real power is being concentrated in some shadowy organs... In areas of militant popular protests like Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh and the State of West Bengal,... (the) organs of... state power are systematically resorting to actions and methods *never sanctioned* by any law of the land... (and to) open terror... in close collaboration with non-official strongarm formations... The ruling party resorts to the rigging of polls... The railway strike represents a sort of watershed in this process of complex development—the passing over from a rule with the 'force of phrases' to that of force without phrases."<sup>40</sup>

It is in this context of economic crisis, growing discontent and authoritarianism, that Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court pronounced his judgement on 12 June, 1975. By allowing Raj Narain's petition on the ground that Indira had used the services of Y. Kapoor, a Central government officer, and certain other U. P. officials to "further her election prospects", the Judge unseated Mrs. Gandhi. The 20 day stay-order on the judgement—to enable the Congress to make alternate leadership arrangement—however made it possible for Indira not to resign immediately. While opposition parties asked for resignation and Jagjivan Ram and others planned to succeed Indira, various persons—such as Sanjay Gandhi, Om Mehta, Bansi Lal and R. K. Dhawan—encouraged her to remain in power and "organized" mass support rallies. In fact, *"the Prime Minister was left with no option but to clamp dictatorship or quit"*, for the challenge of the High Court judgement was much more immediate and total than the JP movement.<sup>41</sup> As we know, Indira made up her mind and suddenly proclaimed the Emergency. When the Cabinet was "informed", the spineless ministers did not dare to protest.

The excesses of the nineteen months of Emergency are well known and become clearer every day as the Shah Commission progresses in its inquiry: preventive and illegal detentions under MISA,<sup>42</sup> tortures and other police brutalities, press

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40. *ibid.*, p. 139.

41. J. A. Naik, p. 15, cf. pp. 12-20. The italics are ours. The author points out that, within a fortnight, Indira got the Constitution amended to place her election beyond the scrutiny of the judiciary and to give her immunity from civil and criminal proceedings. According to him, Indira was involved in the criminal acts of the Research and Analysis Wing of the Secretariat (RAW).

42. The official number of persons arrested and detained without trial under MISA is 34,630 (G. G. Mirchandani, pp. 70-1). Several experts speak of more than 1,00,000 political prisoners.



ensorship, subversion of the Constitution,<sup>43</sup> coercive methods in clearing the slums and in family planning programmes, the abusive roles of Sanjay Gandhi and Bansi Lal, etc. *On the economic front, the Congress continued its reformist policies.*<sup>44</sup>

On Jan 18, 1977, Indira Gandhi surprised the nation and announced that fresh elections would be held within two months, in mid-March. Several factors most likely influenced this crucial decision: political and economic pressures from foreign countries, recommendations from Indian personalities, desire of reorganizing the Congress, fear that a worsening economy would diminish her political prospects, a complete misjudgement—based on wrong information—of the people's mood, and the hope of a decisive victory over a still divided and unprepared opposition.<sup>45</sup> Under JP's inspiration, the newly formed Janata Party and its allies swept the polls and captured as many as 299 seats against the 153 of the Congress.<sup>46</sup> Indira Gandhi and her son, Sanjay, were respectively defeated by more than 55,000 and 75,000 votes. The Congress even drew a blank in UP, Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi, and won only one seat in M. P., three in West Bengal, and four in Orissa—92 of its seats coming from the southern States of Tamil Nadu, A.P., Karnataka and Kerala, and 10 each from Gujarat and Assam. The same trend manifested itself in the June 1977 State elections: "The Congress Party, which had ruled all but one of the ten States which went to the polls,—was not able to retain its rule in a single State—The Janata Party took on the mantle of power in seven States; the CPI (M)-led Left Front assumed office in West Bengal; the Akali Dal in Punjab and the All India Anna-DMK, a splinter group of the DMK, in Tamil Nadu."<sup>47</sup> *In the Lok Sabha and State elections, the Indian masses thus clearly rejected the Emergency and its abuses.*

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43. For details, see Madhu Limaye, "The New Constitutional Amendments: Death-knell of Popular Liberties", Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1977; G. G. Mirchandani, "Subverting the Constitution", Abhinav Publications, Delhi, 1977; Mankekar, pp. 172-82, and Nargolkar, "JP Vindicated I", pp. 50-68.

44. On this, see "Post-Independence Economic Policies", pp. 82-7.

45. For various conjectures, see for example Naik (pp. 47-9), Nargolkar (op. cit., pp. 152-3), and Nayar (op. cit., pp. 155-8).

46. For an analysis of the 1977 Lok Sabha and State elections, see Mirchandani and Sharda Paul. The last book contains various election manifestoes as well as several extracts of important speeches.

47. Mirchandani, p. 210.



After these stunning defeats, the Congress was in deep disarray. Mrs. Gandhi kept a low profile for a few months. Indira's popularity with certain sections of the masses and influence in the party, and perhaps also the false hope that she would recognize her mistakes and disown the Emergency caucus, prevented other Congressmen from taking a strong stand against her. In spite of her electoral debacle, she thus succeeded to protect most of her lieutenants from open denunciation and expulsion, to have Brahmananda Reddy appointed as new Congress President instead of S.S. Ray and even, later on, to make the CWC advise Congressmen that they need not cooperate with the Shah Commission.

In the last months of 1977, Indira however failed in her bid to replace Reddy as Congress President and to impose her views on the party. And the Shah Commission continued to unearth the scandals of the Emergency. Realising that she would progressively be eliminated from power in the Congress and desiring a stronger base to oppose the Shah Commission, Indira made a gamble and split, once again, the party on January 1 and 2, 1978. This time, however, she did not succeed to give an ideological overtone to the conflict and to attract much public support. Except U.P., Kashmir, Karnataka and to some extent, Andhra Pradesh, the bulk of the Congress organization seemed to stand solidly behind Chavan and Reddy. At long last, the latter categorically denounced the Indira faction and stated that the March election results represented popular anger "against the misuse of power during the emergency, and against the small group of people who wielded virtually unlimited power at the time."

The Feb 1978 Assembly elections however showed that Indira Gandhi has not lost much of her popularity in the villages of the South and that she still remains a skilled tactician and master of political survival.<sup>48</sup> The Congress (I) indeed registered surprising and convincing victories in Karnataka (151 seats, the Janata and Congress respectively won 58 and 2 each) and Andhra Pradesh (175 seats against 60 and 30 of the Janata and Congress). With its 62 seats (the Congress got 70 and the Janata 99), the Congress (I) also made a better show than expected in Maharashtra and became a partner in the Congress coalition government. In spite of the poor performance of the Congress (I) in the three Northern States, these results undoubtedly strengthened the position of Indira Gandhi and led to the resignation of the Congress President, B. Reddy, who is temporarily replaced by S. Singh.

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48. On these election results and their political implications, see for example "India Today", March 16-31, pp. 34-41; EPW, 1978, pp. 435-6; and "Himmat" March 3, 1978, pp. 7, & 26 and 28.



## The Future

What is the respective future of the Singh-Chavan and Indira Congresses ? What contribution can they make to the building up of the country ?

To answer, *one needs to give great weight to the class character of the INC and its economic policies.* In this chapter, we kept these questions in the background as they were treated at length in the three previous booklets. It is however necessary to emphasize here that the political leadership of India has been closely associated "with the groups that had earlier risen to power and had since gained control over substantial institutional and financial resources."<sup>49</sup> Except perhaps on the question of the use of State power, both Congress parties more or less share the same ideology. In spite of their rhetoric ; they stand for a basically capitalist pattern of economic development. And thirty years of Congress rule have conclusively shown that this pattern cannot deliver the goods in a poor and populous country like India. One has indeed to remember that the gap between words and actions, promises and performances, existed long before the emergency and that the need to suppress popular discontent played a great role in Indira's decision of adopting more authoritarian measures. As Gupta rightly observes, "Instead of equal opportunity for all for economic growth there was growth of monopoly houses; instead of the distribution of profits among the people there was concentration of wealth in the hands of a few; instead of ceiling on incomes there was widening of gap between the rich and the poor, and instead of reforms in the administrative machinery there was inertia, corruption, nepotism and red-tapism all around. Instead of the fruits of freedom reaching the hands of the common man there were increasing hardships, sufferings and lawlessness."<sup>50</sup> *In today's explosive India, so different from Nehru's India, the credibility gap is bound to increase under a Congress government.*

*The truth is that the Congress is a liberal and reformist party, slightly left-of-centre.* Its left wing periodically succeeds to project a more radical image, but rarely to implement its policies. And, we may ask, what is so "socialist" about the abolition of the princes' privileges, the nationalization of

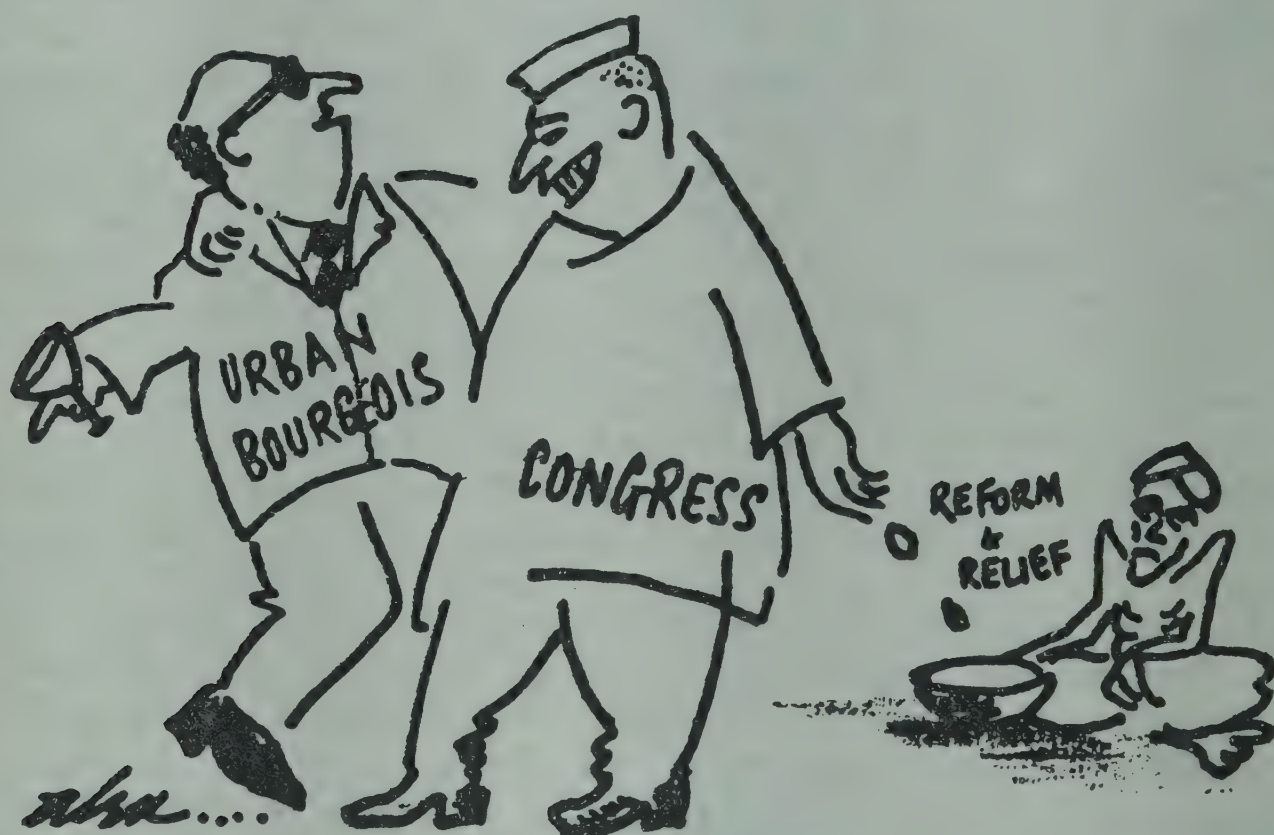
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49. R. Kothari, op. cit., p. 73. In their respective studies of political parties in Baroda city during the 1971 General Election and of the Bihar State Assembly between 1967 and 1971, T. Pantham (op. cit.) and D. Jha ("State Legislature in India", Abhinav Publications, Delhi, 1977) arrived at similar conclusions.

50. p. 527.



banks or general insurance and the enactment of half-hearted land reforms? In fact, *the Congress stands for secularism, modernization and industrialization, and represents more the interests of the industrialists and businessmen than those of the landlords and rural bourgeoisie.* It also favours certain welfare programmes and tries to correct, through its reforms, the most blatant social and economic injustices. *Under a Congress government the small peasants, the agricultural and industrial workers as well as the Harijans, tribals and minorities, can therefore expect certain measures of relief and reforms, but no drastic and permanent changes.* As we shall see in the next chapter, this rather meagre package is perhaps more than what the Janata has to offer.



*The class character of the Congress*

Though the prospects of the two Congress parties progressively brighten with the Janata's poor performance, *their future remains somewhat uncertain.* At the end of March 1978, the Congress(I) possesses a slight majority over the Congress in the Rajya Sabha; yet, it has only 62 seats against the 75 of the Congress in the Lok Sabha. The ongoing elections for the Rajya Sabha will however leave this institution in the hands of the Congress parties till 1980. The recent successes of the Congress (I) make some politicians to join this party and to speak of Congress unity, but others stoutly oppose these moves. Unless the Shah Commission and the possible prosecution of Indira Gandhi seriously alter the fortunes of her party, it therefore seems that the Congress(I) will progressively gain ground, while the other Congress party will maintain its identity and keep a lower profile in Indian politics.



It has now become evident that the Congress(I) will play an important role in Indian politics. This is very clear for the States of Andhra, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and even Kerala. At the national level, the party will probably resort to agitational methods and present itself as the defender of the oppressed. The relative strength of the Congress(I) may also protect Indira against the punishment she rightly deserves for the Emergency and its excesses. Yet, Mrs. Gandhi is far from having won the political battle. As a whole, the industrial workers have indeed turned against her. Many politicians, who know that their future depends on her elimination, will also fight to the end against her returning to power. A large section of the intelligentsia and urban middle class has finally been antagonized by the suppression of civic liberties and there is a widespread fear that another Indira government would bring about more sophisticated and harsh repressive measures. For some years at least, these various factors will constitute severe obstacles in the path of Indira Gandhi.

The Singh-Chavan Congress, on the other hand, seems to have lost its popular appeal and morale. In spite of its still powerful grass-root organization, it presently lacks charismatic leadership. The exodus of Indira Gandhi helps the party to progressively dissociate itself from the Emergency, but fails to project a dynamic image. It remains to be seen whether the Congress stands a better chance than the Congress(I) in the North. The already noticeable dissatisfaction of the people with the Janata is bound to grow. *Though the Congress parties cannot solve the basic problems of the people, it is to be hoped that they will succeed to reorganize themselves and provide secular, liberal and reformist alternatives to the Janata Party.* Since the real leftist forces are divided and too weak to be expected to play this role in the near future, the country badly needs them to counterbalance the Janata. Whether the Congress parties succeed or not to recapture power at the Centre and in the States, it seems that *this is their historical role till real leftist and socialist forces assume power.*



## 2. THE JANATA PARTY

*The 1977 general and State elections have introduced major changes in Indian politics.* For the first time after Independence, a non-Congress government has come to power at the Centre, with a support of 299 members out of 542. In June, the Janata has moreover assumed power in seven States;<sup>1</sup> in Feb 1978, it did the same in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

This is not the whole story. At the Centre, "the ruling Janata Party is unquestionably dominated by Right-wing forces—with the former Jana Sangh and BLD having 91 and 79 MPs respectively. The former Congress (O), a Right of Centre force, has got 56 MPs. The former socialists and ex-socialist congressmen like Chandrasekhar, Mohan Dharia Krishna Kant and others, do not number more than 30 MPs in aggregate."<sup>2</sup> The former CFD has 27 seats. "In the 44-member Council (of Ministers), BLD leads the list with 12 members, Jana Sangh 11, Congress (O) 10, Socialists 4, CFD 3, Akali Dal 2 and ex-Congressmen (who went out with Mr. Chandrashekhar) 2."<sup>3</sup> There were also deep tensions in the selection of the Janata ministers at the Centre, of its candidates for the 10 State Assemblies and the Chief Ministers of the 7 pro-Janata States. In the last instance, "the Jana Sangh-BLD combine... has seen to it that other smaller partners are crowded out of the race".<sup>4</sup> "Four former BLD men (indeed) got elected as chief ministers in UP, Bihar, Haryana and Orissa, while three former Jana Sangh leaders were chosen in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. The Chief Executive Councillor of the Delhi Metropolitan Council was also a former Jana Sangh leader."<sup>5</sup>

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1. See above p. 17. In 10 State assembly polls, the results were as follows: Janata (1,246 seats), Congress (329), CPI (46), CPM (205), Akali Dal (58), AIADMK (130), Independents and others (184). The Congress lost 891 (74%) of the seats it held, while the Janata gained 860 seats! The CPI representation went down from 120 to 46 seats, while the CPM went up from 19 to 205. For details, see Mirchandani, pp. 210-14 & 263-4.

2. "New Correlation of Forces", in MR vol X, 1977, p. 324.

3. "All the PM's Men", in "India Today", Sept 1-15, 1977, p. 17. This article gives the list of all the ministers with their former party affiliation.

4. "The Emergence of the Janata Caucus", in "Secular Democracy", July 1, 1977, p. 11.

5. Mirchandani, p. 211.



*Tensions have also greatly increased within the Janata after the Feb 1978 State elections. These intestine divisions as well as the predominance of rightist elements have to be taken into serious consideration in any study of the Janata Party.*

What does the Janata stand for? What groups does it represent? Which interests and ideologies? How well-knit is this new Party? Has the merger changed the nature of its constituent parties? What can we expect from a Janata government? The answer to such questions is crucial for the future of India. *The euphoria caused by the entirely welcome lifting of the Emergency should not mask the grave dangers hidden in the Janata triumph. It is therefore very important to analyse the various parties that formed the Janata, the circumstances that led them to unite, and the socio-economic and political trends already visible in the Janata performance.* Only this can enable us to foresee the kind of government the Janata will provide for the country. In this chapter, we shall therefore successively consider "The Constituent Parties", "The JP Movement", "The Janata Performance" and "The Future".



## The Constituent Parties<sup>6</sup>

The Janata Party was launched on Jan 23 and officially formed on May 1, 1977, by the disbandment and union of the

6. For brief reflections on the Janata, see for example M. Mohanty, "Beyond the Congress System", in "Seminar" no 212, pp. 30-34; Naik, pp. 108-22; and "No Revolution but Restoration" and "New Correlation of Forces", in MR 1977, pp. 312-13 & 323-5. For more details on the constituent parties, see "Manorama 1977" (Manorama Publishing House, Kottayam, pp. 403-8), Hiro (pp. 183-93), Chatterji (ed) (pp. 26-54 & 74-110), and Singh and Rao (ed) (pp. 78-103 & 133-71).



Congress (O), JS, BLD, and SP. Five days later, the CFD of Jagjivan Ram was also disbanded and joined the new party. To understand better the Janata, let us now briefly study the JS, the BLD, and the SP.<sup>7</sup>

P. Mukerjee founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951. The party's antecedents are the Hindu Mahasabha (1915) and the RSS, a para-military organization established in 1925 to defend and foster Hindu interests against Islam.<sup>8</sup> From its inception, the JS equated "nationalism with Hinduism"—thus considering Muslims and Christians second-rate citizens and even "internal threats"—and promoted Hindu culture and Hindi. Playing on the religious and linguistic feelings of north-Indians, the party became very powerful in the RSS strongholds, namely UP, Punjab, and, to a lesser extent, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. *On the economic plane, the JS is well-known for its rightist and conservative policies* and basically stands for the rural rich as well as the middle and small businessmen and the white-collar workers. Its 1967 and 1971 election manifestoes for example criticized the Congress' "unending series of land reform laws" and the lowering of land ceilings—Though the JS became less revivalist, communal and obscurantist, after its Jullundar Session (1966), these trends are still at work in the party today. *With its greater representation and better organization, the JS is the most "active" partner in the Janata Party.*<sup>9</sup>

The BLD was founded in 1974 under the leadership of Charan Singh. It merged seven non-communist opposition

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7. We spoke of the Congress (O) in our treatment of the 1969 split. Except for its anti-emergency statements, the CFD resembles the Congress.
  8. For details on the RSS, see Singh and Rao (pp. 135-9); M. S. Golwalkar ("A Bunch of Thoughts", Vikrama Prakashan, Bangalore, 1966) and Gobind Sahai ("RSS Ideology, Technique and Propaganda", Delhi, 1952). After Gandhi's assassination by Godse, a former RSS member, the RSS was banned between 1949-59.
  9. K. N. S., "Janata: Constraints and Contradictions," in "Southern Economist", Dec 1, 1977, p. 5. Mohanty also writes: "The Jana Sangh with its highly motivated RSS cadre, had a more disciplined organization with a rigid, religious orientation under a collective leadership... It is indeed too early to accept the Jana Sangh's transformed identity." (op. cit., p. 33). And Naik: "The Jana Sangh is the most cohesive and strong component of the Janata Party... The RSS cadre controls the Jana Sangh" (p. 110, cf. pp. 110-12). Throughout the merger moves, Charan Singh often took an ideological stand against the RSS. Recently, the question of eligibility of RSS cadre for Janata membership brought out sharp differences of views in the Party. Vajpayee (JS) stalled the RSS-Janata row ("The Indian Express", Bangalore, Dec. 22, 1977, p. 1).



parties – the most important being BKD,<sup>10</sup> SWA, SSP and Utkal Congress—with the intention of providing a “national alternative and corrective” to the ruling Congress on the basis of pragmatic economic policies. From the beginning, the BLD made determined efforts to unite the non-communists beyond the labels of right and left.<sup>11</sup> In spite of these claims, *the BLD is, as a whole, conservative and rightist, but non-communal*. It believes in a certain “Gandhian Socialism”: “an egalitarian society.... where.... the citizens will be free in the choice and ordering of their economic life”; emphasis on agriculture, small-scale industries and employment policies; decentralization; appropriate technology; more or less firm rejection of nationalisation and land reforms; etc. Its political base lies among the rural rich of the Hindi belt. Contrary to the JS, the BLD has a rather loose organizational network. With Charan Singh and his likeminded colleagues, *the BLD constitutes another very “active” element of the Janata Party*.<sup>12</sup>

The non-communist socialist parties have a long history of splits, mergers and changes of names in India.<sup>13</sup> The two socialist parties, respectively founded in 1950 by J. P. Narayan and A. Kripalani, united in 1952. Dr. Lohia left this party in 1955 and created the more militant SP. Subsequently, there were mergers in 1964 and 1971, and splits in 1965 and 1972. The SSP, under Raj Narain’s leadership, finally merged into the BLD in 1974, while George Fernandes’ SP, became a component of the Janata Party in 1977. Indian socialists oppose communism and believe in democratic socialism. In his famous Pachmarhi address, Lohia for example proclaimed the irrelevance of both capitalism and communism for developing nations.<sup>14</sup> Instead of focusing on the economic transformation of society through class struggle, socialists aim at a complete revolution<sup>15</sup> through the Gandhian method of civil disobedience. In spite of personality conflicts and different degrees of militancy, the SSP and SP agreed to develop a people’s movement to fight the feudal-capitalist social set-up and remove the Congress. In fact, however, the economic policies

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10. The BKD played the greater role. After its initial successes in 1962 (22 Lok Sabha seats) and 1967 (44 seats), the SWA more or less collapsed in the 1971 (8 seats) and 1972 elections.

11. On the BLD ideology, see Naik, pp. 31-3 & 108-9.

12. K. N. S., “Janata...”, op. cit., p. 5.

13. For details, see “Manorama 1977”, op. cit., pp. 403-4.

14. Singh & Rao, pp. 87-9.

15. For a description of this revolution, see Singh & Rao, pp. 90-1.



of these two parties do not differ much from those of the Congress (R). *On account of their weak ideology and poor representation and organization, the SSP and SP play only a minor role in the Janata, which has become the graveyard of non-communist socialists in India.*

## The JP Movement

The first chapter already described the people's growing dissatisfaction with the Congress in the 1960s and the consequent results of the 1967 elections. The coalition governments, to a great extent, failed and Indira Gandhi succeeded to reassert the power of the INC between 1969 and 1972. Let us now briefly consider the 1972-75 period—which witnessed the Gujarat struggle and the JP Movement—and its far-reaching implications for Indian politics.

After two relatively good years (1969-71), the economic situation deteriorated: "Between 1971-2 and 1973-4, for example, per capita availability of foodgrains fell by 11 per cent, and industrial production stagnated, whereas the wholesale price index rose by 33 per cent and per capita income declined by 4.2 per cent. Large sections of society, particularly in the urban areas, blamed the ruling party for this, and began to express their discontent by participating in anti-government rallies, demonstrations, and general business and industrial shutdowns."<sup>16</sup> In late 1973 and early 1974, large sections of the urban population of Gujarat, headed by the students, ousted Chimanbhai Patel's corrupt ministry and forced the Centre to dissolve the State Assembly. Later on, Morarji Desai's fall led the Government to end President's rule and to hold elections, which the Janta Morcha won on June 12, 1975.<sup>17</sup> Still more importantly, the students launched a similar movement in Bihar in 1974 and, after severe government and police repression, asked JP Narayan to lead them.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Hiro, pp. 255-6.

17. On the Gujarat struggle, see Hiro (pp. 256-74 & 260-1), A. R. Desai ("The Gujarat Struggle and its Vilifiers", in EPW vol IX no 16, pp. 625-6) and G. Shah ("The Upsurge in Gujarat", in EPW vol IX, nos 32-34, 1977).

18. On the JP movement, see the two books of Nargolkar; Pandit, pp. 142-61, and Naik, pp. 33-7. The review "People's Action" also contains several articles on JP, especially in vol 8 nos 5 & 9 and vol 9 nos 1 & 2. For critical evaluations see for example MR, June 1975, and "JP's Real Mission" in EPW 1975, pp. 509-11.



Besides winning a wide popular support<sup>19</sup>, the JP Movement rallied, by the end of 1974, all the opposition parties except the CPI and progressively spread to other parts of India, especially Delhi and West Bengal. After the Allahabad verdict, mass demonstrations and satyagrahas were being organized when the emergency was declared on June 25, 1975.

At their 1975 meeting, party and non-party leaders expressed their immediate and long-term aims as follows: "Some of the immediate objectives of the Bihar movement, viz, the elimination of political corruption, bringing down prices, removal of unemployment, educational and electoral reforms, have received considerable public notice. But the wider and long-term aims of the Bihar struggle include basic social, economic, political cultural, and educational changes leading ultimately to a total revolution.... Such a programme will by and large be within the Gandhian frame. The emphasis has to be on the devolution of authority and decentralisation of economy, on agricultural development, equitable landownership, application of labour-intensive technology..., extensive-spread of domestic and rural industries, regional planning and development and removal of illiteracy in five years."<sup>20</sup> While rejecting communism, JP claimed to work for both socio-economic and political freedom or, in other words, for socialism and democracy.<sup>21</sup>

Certain *lessons* of major importance can be drawn from the successes and failures of the JP movement. First, *the legitimacy and efficiency*, at least in the Indian context, *of non-violent extra-constitutional methods*. It is well-known that Gandhi developed the theory of, and resorted to, passive resistance and civil disobedience in the independence struggle and contributed, more than anybody else, to create a mass

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19. "An opinion poll conducted by the official Indian Institute of Mass Communication in Patna, Gaya, Muzaffarpur, and Monghyr in Bihar revealed that nearly 70 per cent of the population supported the (anti-Congress) agitation led by J. P. Narayan. Those who disagreed with the movement amounted to 6.8 per cent." (News item in the "Overseas Hindustan Times", Dec 12, 1974, quoted by Hiro, p. 257). An estimated 40,000 students gave up their studies to join the JP movement in Bihar (Naik, p. 7).

20. Official statement, "Party-leaders Conference to Total Revolution", in "People's Action", vol 9 no 1.

21. On this, see for example "JP Vindicated!", pp. 7-8, 23-5 & 168-9.



movement.<sup>22</sup> After Gandhi's death, Vinobha Bhave excluded satyagraha from the Sarvodaya movement. In his efforts to pacify the naxalites in 1970 in Musahari, Bihar, JP Narayan "started questioning the efficacy of the Vinobhian technique of gentle persuasion in achieving... revolutionary objectives... After due deliberation, he had come to the conclusion that resort to the Gandhian type of non-violent satyagraha on a mass scale, in preference to or along with the technique of persuasion.., could alone deliver the goods."<sup>23</sup> In spite of Vinobha, the majority of sarvodaya workers approved JP's views in two important meetings in July 1974 and March 1975.<sup>24</sup>

During the Bihar movement, JP often defended the legitimacy of satyagraha. From his Chandigarh prison, he also wrote to Indira Gandhi: "In a democracy the citizen has an inalienable right to civil disobedience when he finds that other channels of redress or reform have dried up... This is the new dimension added to democracy by Gandhi."<sup>25</sup> In the same letter, he further explained: "The people do have the right to ask for the resignation of an elected government if it has gone corrupt and has been misruling."<sup>26</sup>

Even those who disagree with JP's concepts of government and total revolution and mistrust his alliance with rightist forces, have to recognize that the satyagraha method, once again, succeeded to create an unprecedented mass movement and to threaten the government. *The JP movement showed the great possibilities of non-violent extra-constitutional action in India.* A clear stand for non-violence enabled JP to get the support of large sections of society which otherwise would have opposed

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22. See above p. 7, J. Bandyopadhyaya thus defines Gandhi's distinctive contribution to politics: "The essential strategy of satyagraha... is that of nonviolent noncooperation, which in turn may lead to many different tactics, depending on the nature and circumstances of the struggle, from individual fasting to general strikes, violation of laws and the setting up of a parallel government, always subject to the minimum condition that the opponent must remain physically unharmed and even treated as a person with a wide charity, and that all the physical suffering, including the violence of the opponent, involved in the struggle must be borne by the satyagrahis themselves without retaliation." ("Mao Tse-Tung and Gandhi", Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1973, p. 57).

23. "JP Vindicated!", pp. 123.

24. *ibid.*, pp. 88-9.

25. Quoted by Naik, p. 131; see also "JP Vindicated!", p. 112.

26. *ibid.*, p. 130.



him on account of morality or fear. In the Indian context at least, it seems possible to build up a people's movement on non-violence. In the next chapter, we shall discuss whether or not the recourse to violence is necessary or useful in certain circumstances... For the time being, let it suffice to emphasize that the satyagraha method could be made use of by people who have different ideas and who are politically more realistic and consequent than JP Narayan.

*The second lesson of the JP movement is the necessity of political parties to bring about basic and permanent changes in India's socio-economic structures.* JP discovered the limitations of the persuasion method, but failed to realise the great need of joining and working through a political party. Pressure movements can exercise the role of watch-dogs and even overthrow governments, but they cannot transform society. This task requires a well-organised political party. Even a young and healthy JP Narayan would be unable, from outside, to decisively influence the policies of the Janata Party! Naik indeed correctly observes: "It is unfortunate that both the Gandhians and the socialists are led away by umpiring notions in society. They relish the role of confronting political power (more) than assuming the responsibility of ruling over the country. Such an anarchic approach cannot do any good to anybody. Political power by itself may not do the miracle of solving all human problems, but it may not be lost sight of the fact that the planned and purposeful use of political power has removed economic and social backwardness from Soviet Russia and Communist China within so short a period as one's own lifetime. *The achievement of communism above all is the achievement of political power and the earlier this is grasped by the Gandhians and the socialists in this country the better will it be for them and others.*"<sup>27</sup>

*The third and last lesson we would like to mention is the necessity of leftist political parties.* In spite of his revolutionary goals—often questioned by leftists—, JP's fear of communism made him to associate himself with rightist political parties. JP was aware of the dangers of this attitude, for he occasionally stated that he did not rely on the Congress (O) and the JS, but on the socialist parties, the Sarvodaya workers, the students and the people,<sup>28</sup> to carry out his revolution. Yet, the rightist political parties ultimately installed themselves into

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27. p. 7. On this, see also Pantham, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

28. For fear of affecting production, JP failed to seriously involve the industrial workers and the peasants in his movement, which would have been much stronger and better organized with their participation.



power through the Janata victory... If JP sincerely aimed at "total revolution", he was utopian to think of transforming or controlling such rightist forces... Only ideologically sound political parties can bring about a socio-economic revolution!

*The historical role of JP Narayan and his movement has been to denounce the reformist, corrupt and increasingly authoritarian regime of Indira Gandhi,<sup>29</sup> and to help restoring political democracy in India after the emergency. It also played a major role in the union of the non-communist opposition parties<sup>30</sup>. The formation of the Janata Party constitutes a development of capital importance in Indian politics, for the Congress maintained itself in power for so long mainly on account of the proliferation of opposition parties and the consequent division of votes.<sup>31</sup> For all his revolutionary talk, however, JP created only a conservative political party...*

## The Janata Performance

The Janata victory raised high expectations. The joy and euphoria of the "new independence" made people to expect a "new start". The citizens of India forgot the past records of most elected representatives and constituent parties and began to hope... Yet, less than three months later, *the people's disappointment* already expressed itself in the State assembly elections in the Hindi belt: in spite of its excellent performance, the Janata lost more than 25% of the votes it had polled in the Lok Sabha elections. Except for U.P. (7%) and M.P. (3%), the Congress did not either improve its percentage of polled votes. In these elections, the voters were indeed inclined to turn towards "independents and others", wherever viable alterna-

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29. On this, see "The Same Old Pattern", in MR vol X, 1977, pp. 373-4.

30. On the merger moves, see "Manorama 1977" (p. cit., pp. 404-5), Naik (pp. 31-46), and Mirchandani (pp. 76-97). These are the landmarks: the 1970 Parliament collaboration of Congress (O), JS, SWA, BKD ; PSS and SSP, the 1970 poll alliance of Congress (O), SWA and JS; the seven-party formation of the BLD in 1974; the efforts of JP and the 1975 Gujarat Front; the renewed efforts of JP after his release from jail in November 1975; the Janata-CFD combine for the 1977 elections and the official constitution of the Janata in May 1977.

31. Table I shows the Congress' relatively low percentage of votes polled: 45% (1951-2), 47.78% (1957), 44.72% (1962), 40.73% (1967), and 43.64% (1971). In 1977, the Congress and Janata respectively polled 34.54 and 43.17% of the votes and bagged 153 and 299 seats.



tives existed.<sup>32</sup> To understand better this growing disillusionment, let us briefly consider the performance of the Janata in the political, economic and social fields.

On the political front, the Janata has kept its unity till now, but serious tensions manifested themselves in the appointment of ministers at the Centre and the States, the selection of candidates for State assemblies, the elaboration of the economic policy Statement, and the discussions on preventive detention. There are intestine struggles between the constituent parties and even between the JS and the RSS.<sup>33</sup> These divisive tendencies have become increasingly public and sharp in March and April 1978. The hope for "clean" politics was also belied by the acceptance of defectors, Charan Singh's popularity meeting in Delhi and the many "old faces" on electoral lists. On the one hand, the Janata fulfilled several of the promises of its political charter—for example, the restoration of fundamental freedom and the abolition of censorship—, passed the 44th Constitution (amendment) Bill and will present the important 42nd amendment Bill in the next session of the Parliament.<sup>34</sup> The Janata moreover let the opposition parties to address the nation on the All-India Radio, and entered into regular consultations with them. It has even been agreed that Basic Constitutional changes will be made only through referendum.<sup>35</sup> After much hesitation, the Centre finally yielded to public pressure on MISA and abolished preventive detention;<sup>36</sup>

32. On this, see "Assembly Elections and After. 1-Performance Analysis", in "Secular Democracy", July, 1, 1977, pp 8-10, and Mirchandani, pp. 213-4.

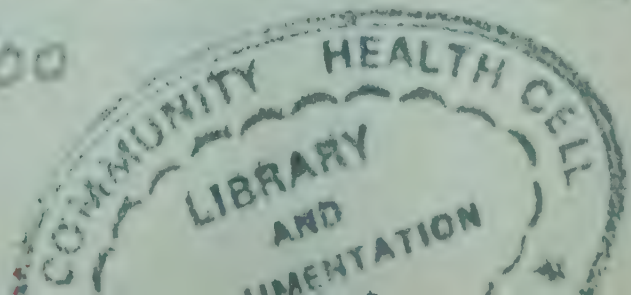
33. S. Banarjee, "The RSS is Janata's Gadfly. Before splitting the Janata Party it may split the Jana Sangh", in "Perspective", Nov 1977, pp. 17-19. There were 6 million RSS activists in 1977. R. Thapar wrote: "The undercover operations of the RSS, despite its respective posturings in the Jan Sangh, are beginning to rock the Janata Party" ("Non-Performers and Non-Starters", in EPW 1977, p. 1961).

34. On this see, "The Indian Express", Dec 20 & 21, 1977, p. 1, and Dec 29, "Janata efforts to restore democracy", p. 7; and "Balance Sheet of Janata's First Year", in "Himmat", March 24, 1978, p. 14.

35. "The Indian Express", Jan 1, 1978, p. 1.

36. For details, see "The Indian Express", Dec 21, 1977, p. 1; "More Second Thoughts", in EPW 1977, pp. 1915-6; C. Raghavan "Janata's Misa", in "Mainstream", Dec 17, 1977, pp. 12-4; "Scrap the Hated Bill", *ibid.*, March 11, 1978, pp. 1-2; N. Chowdhury, "Do we need preventive detention?", in "Himmat", March 17, 1978, pp. 8-9, 26 & March 24, pp. 24-5; and "Centre to give up move for detention law", in "The Indian Express", March 23 & 25, 1978, pp. 1 & 8.

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mini-Misas however exist in Kashmir and U.P.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the Janata promises of introducing electoral reforms and deleting property from the Fundamental Rights remain unfulfilled; all political prisoners are not yet freed.<sup>38</sup> Forgetting his own past tactics, Morarji Desai has also become allergic to demonstrations, strikes, fasts and agitations!<sup>39</sup> Though several enquiry commissions have been set up, the government is rather slow in punishing the guilty, perhaps as some of its own supporters would be implicated. *Except for the blatant abuses of the emergency, the political scene is not therefore very different from the one that prevailed during the Congress rule.*

The Janata finds it hard to evolve its economic policies. Its manifesto, which was not seriously discussed, and its first Union Budget lacked a definite orientation.<sup>40</sup> In August, the three-day session of the JWC failed to evolve a coherent and common approach.<sup>41</sup> The November statement on Economic Policy,<sup>42</sup> which remains rather vague and contains more promises than well-planned objectives and programmes, represents a victory for the moderates. *Rural vested interests are better represented in the Janata than in the former Indira regime, but the industrialists are far from losing ground.*<sup>43</sup> The Policy Statement indeed foresees 40% of the public sector investment for agriculture, the restoration of the 1970-71 price parity between agriculture and industrial goods; the abolition, within three years, of excise duties on fertilizers, insecticides and weedicides; the reduction of fertilizer prices; the removal of zonal restrictions on the movement of paddy and rice, the earmarking of rural deposits for rural development,

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37. N. K. Singh, "Mini-Misa against Workers", in EPW, 1977, p. 1764.

38. S. Banarjee, "Pledges Unredeemed, Promises Broken", in EPW 1977, pp. 1925-6.

39. "The Indian Express", Dec 28, 1977, p. 1; on the rather similar attitude of the Home Minister, see MR vol XI, 1977, p. 253.

40. For a brief study, see "Post-Independence Economic Policies", pp. 87-91.

41. "Economic Policy Differences in Janata", in EPW 1977, pp. 1526-7.

42. For details, see for example "The Janata Blueprint", in "Southern Economist", Nov 15, 1977, pp. 1-2; "Free-for All Economic Policy", in EPW 1977, p. 1964; Ajit Roy, "Politics of Janata Party's Economics", in MR vol XI 1977, pp. 215-8; and the various articles of "The Indian Express", Nov 28, 1977, p. 9. The influential draft statement of Charan Singh can be found in "Mainstream" Dec 3, 1977, pp. 6-10 & 29-30, and Dec 10, pp. 15-26.

43. This is Ajit Roy's argument (op. cit., pp. 216-8).



etc. The industrial sector, on the other hand, is guaranteed a bigger plan and larger resources in absolute terms. Still more importantly, the 1978-79 Janata budget clearly failed to meet the economic promises of the party and to tackle the twin problems of poverty and inequalities/injustices.<sup>44</sup> *In spite of a few declarations to the contrary, the Janata will do very little about land reforms, restriction of monopolies, social control and nationalization. Though it may generate some jobs, the Janata economic policy—it is by now evident—does not hold great prospects for the people below the poverty line.*

*In the social sphere, the landlords are emboldened and increase their exploitation of the Harijans and landless, especially in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.*<sup>45</sup> Arun Sinha sums up the

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44. On Patel's second budget, see for example the articles in "Southern Economist", March 1, 1978, pp. 1-2; "Mainstream", March 11, pp. 4-10; EPW, March 4, pp. 433-5; "Himmat", March 10, pp. 8-9 & 21; "India Today", March 16-31, pp. 10-11; and "The Illustrated Weekly of India", March 12-18, pp. 12-3. Several articles see the budget as "another missed opportunity". The EPW editorial concludes: "In sum, then, the Budget is far from being the 'bold step forward' that the Finance Minister claims it is. The investment envisaged is modest... The scheme of additional taxation, relying as it does exclusively on indirect levies, is calculated to serve the interests of neither growth nor equity. Ways of turning the reserves of foodgrains and foreign exchange to advantage continue to elude the government. And given the highly skewed distribution of land and the other features of the institutional framework of agriculture over large parts of the country, the seemingly large Plan allocations for agricultural development (e.g., irrigation schemes) and for rural welfare (e.g., drinking water schemes) will have, as in the past, much less than the expected impact on agricultural production and on the living standards of the rural poor." (pp. 434-5). The review "Mainstream" emphasizes the budget's failure to stand for the poor and its bias for the urban and, especially, rural rich: "It (the budget) is certain to push up the prices of cloth, sugar, kerosene, matches and all other essential articles of consumption of the common people, particularly of those in the rural areas..." (p. 6) "Without streamlining and restructuring the village level organisations, mere pumping of additional resources will benefit the old group" (p. 10). Instead of taxing the rich farmers as suggested in the Economic Survey 1977-78, Patel accepted the views of Desai, who opposed an additional tax burden on the farm sector and believed that the industrial sector had reached the limit of taxable capacity!

45. On this, see for example "Secular Democracy", op. cit., pp. 8 & 13; N. K. Singh, "Harijans at Bay", in EPW 1977, p. 1673; Bharat Dogra, "Landlord Terrorism Unmasked", & N. K. Singh, "Murder at Kanadia: The Plight of bonded labour", in "The Indian Express", Nov 24, 1977, p. 9. A. Sinha also wrote a series of articles on the Bihar situation in EPW, 1977: "Not Out of Bondage" (pp. 1599-1600), "Landlords on Rampage in Champuran" (p. 1671), "Police to Landlords' Aid" (pp. 1999-2000), and "Class War, Not Atrocities against Harijans" (pp. 2037-40).



Bihar situation as follows: "Since March this year Bihar has earned the dubious distinction of accounting for the largest number of cases of 'atrocities against harijans' among all the states. The major outrages have occurred in Kargahar, Belchhi Pathadda, Chhaundadano, Gopalpur and Dharampura. The circumstances of these outrages make it clear that they should not be described as 'atrocities against harijans'. The victims had not been killed or persecuted because they were 'harijans' nor were the actions of the landlords just 'atrocities'. While in Kargahar, Pathadda and Gopalpur the armed offensive of the landlords followed struggles for minimum wages, at Dharampura the issue was the occupancy rights of sharecroppers. In Belchhi and Chhaundadano the massacres came as reprisal for challenging the absolute feudal power of the landlords."<sup>46</sup> N. K. Singh similarly speaks of Madhya Pradesh: "The Kanadia massacre, in which four harijans were killed only because they were trying to till the land allotted to them by the government, is being re-enacted in many areas of Madhya Pradesh. Beating and killing of harijans, forcible occupation of lands allotted to them and destruction of their houses and crops continue and have even increased. According to Yamuna Prasad Shastri, Janata Party MP, the atrocities have increased because 'the feudal elements have become emboldened due to the failure of the state government to take effective steps to protect the harijans and the poor landless people'. In fact, at many places the atrocities are being committed by big landholders with the aid and encouragement of the ruling party which, at least in Madhya Pradesh, is another name for the feudal-trader combine that had been thriving under the banner of Jan Sangh."<sup>47</sup> To be fair to the Janata, it should however be added that the condition of Harijans was not bright under the Congress!<sup>48</sup>

"The Marxist Review" describes the present day situation as follows: "Catapulted to power by a massive upsurge of the people in the northern States, the ruling Janata Party has been squandering its fund of immense initial goodwill with a rare prodigality. Internal conflicts of its leading personalities and major constituents at the Centre and the States, innate conservatism of its dominant partners, the increasing gulf between its commitments and performance, and, above all, its inability to stem the tide of the deepening economic crisis—all this has within the relatively short period of about eight

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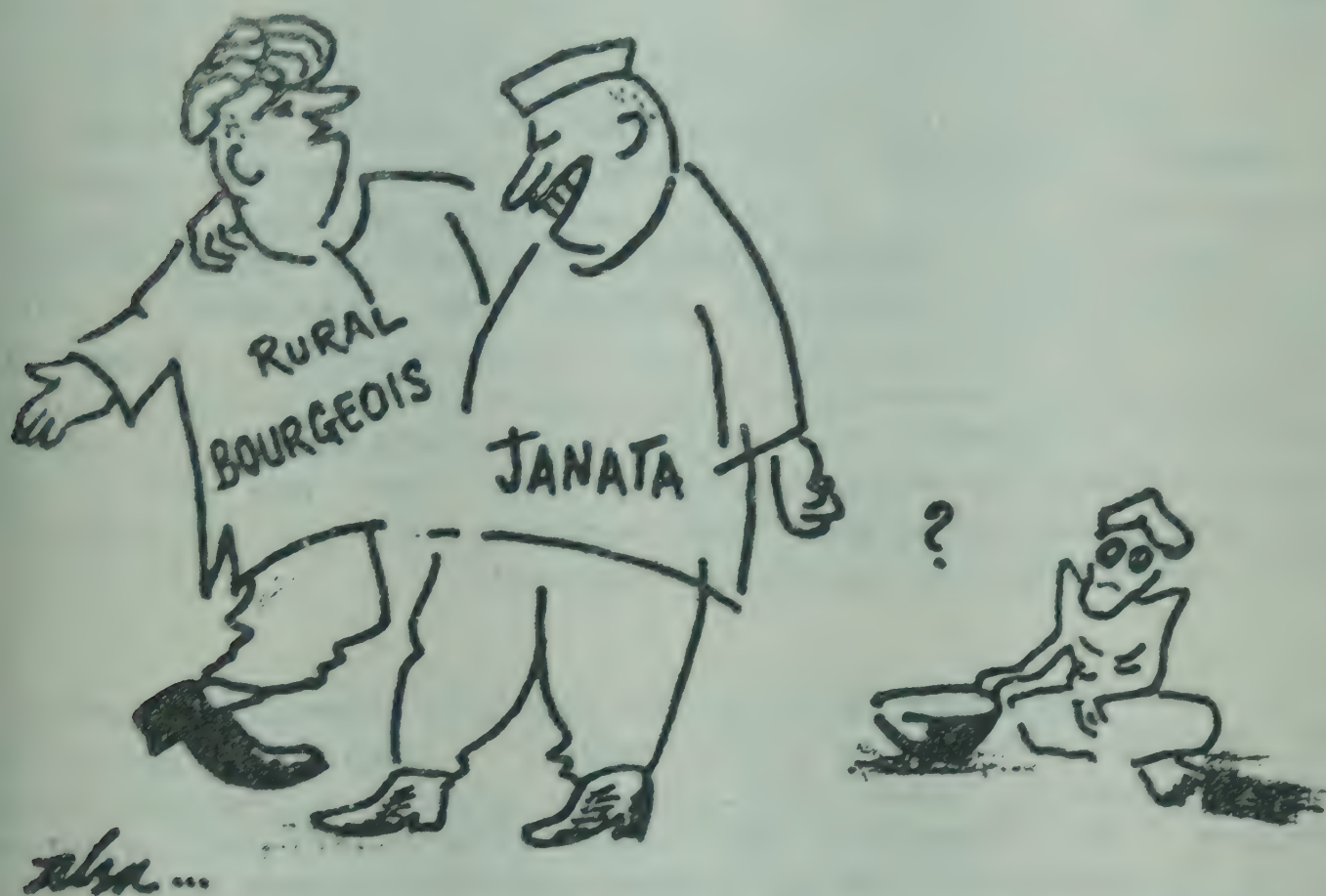
46. "Class War...", op. cit., p. 2037.

47. "Harijans at Bay", op. cit., p. 1673.

48. See for example N. K. Singh, "Oppression of Scheduled Castes", in EPW 1977, pp. 1800-02.



months exposed the Janata Party's incapacity to play the role of agent of change. People everywhere are getting increasingly restive and exercised over the question of a real alternative to the parties, old and new, of the ruling classes."<sup>49</sup> *The Janata performance should not surprise us: it flows from the nature of this party and its major forces. In spite of all the talk about the "peaceful and silent Janata revolution", "what the recent polls have really achieved is not a revolution, but a restoration."*<sup>50</sup>



*The class character of the Janata*

## The Future

What is therefore the future of the Janata ? What contribution can this party make to the building up of the country ?

The following conclusions and forecasts seem warranted:

1. *The Janata is and will remain a rightist and conservative political party.* In spite of the welcome influence of a few socialists, the forces at work in the Janata and their class character, hardly leave any room for true leftist socio-economic policies. The party's emphasis on agriculture, small-scale industries and employment, cannot bear much fruit for people

49. "Some Dimensions of Crisis in India", in vol XI, 1977, pp. 211-2.

50. "No Revolution, But Restoration", in MR vol X, 1977, pp. 312-3. The italics are ours.



below the poverty line without a corresponding effort to transform the socio-economic structure.

2. *There are dangers of communalism and ill-treatment of minorities under the Janata government.* The more secular section of the party, the opposition parties, and the citizens of India must be vigilant and prevent the Janata from following communal policies and falling into the hands of the JS and RSS.

3. *There are also dangers that the Janata will make use of certain repressive and coercive measures—for example police force, torture of prisoners, and murders disguised as "encounters"<sup>51</sup>—against people involved in demonstrations, trade-unions, leftist political parties and naxalism.* In this respect, the government may progressively come to resemble the pre-emergency Indira regime. Such trends may develop in response to people's dissatisfaction. Several Janata leaders are indeed recognized for their anti-leftist and anti-communist stand and undemocratic methods. Here again, vigilance and counter-action are required.

4. *The immediate future of the Janata is intimately connected with the performance of the economy.<sup>52</sup>* Excellent monsoons promote stability, while food scarcity and rising prices bring tensions. *On a long-run, the Janata government will however fall, for its economic policies cannot eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities...*

5. On account of popular pressure and desire to remain in power, *the Janata will most likely keep its unity for the next few years*—except perhaps a few individuals and groups. As the Janata popularity diminishes, certain defections and splits will take place at the Centre and in the States. Though political analysts may find it desirable that the Congress parties and Janata be organised on clearer ideological lines, *the history of Indian politics makes it likely that other factors will play a major role in future defections and splits.*

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51. This question is treated below, in the section on the "CPI (M-L)" (Chapter 3)

52. According to Naik, the future of the Janata ultimately depends on its ability to solve the people's problems and to provide bread for the millions (pp. 55, 58-9, 112-3, and 121-2).



In short, the Janata played the historical role of overthrowing the authoritarian and corrupt Indira regime and of restoring democracy. It also succeeded to diminish the proliferation of parties and the splitting of votes. On account of that, the opposition—be it one of the Congress parties or Janata—will be better organized in the future and will hopefully minimise abuses. In spite of the progressive erosion of its popularity, the Janata will most likely remain united and maintain itself in power till at last the next elections. In this sense, the Janata can be said to have a bright future. *The people's future, under the conservative Janata party, is however less bright.*



### 3. THE COMMUNIST PARTIES

*A proper understanding of India reveals that only a radical transformation of the socio-economic structure of the country can significantly reduce inequalities and improve the conditions of the masses. In other words, only a revolutionary|leftist government can solve the people's problems with truly socialist policies. The two previous chapters have shown that we cannot expect such a government from either the Congress parties or the Janata. This is why various people stress the necessity of a leftist alternative in the country.<sup>1</sup>*



So far, the left has unfortunately been unable to provide this much needed alternative. An analysis of Lok Sabha election results for example indicates that rightwing forces have strengthened themselves since Independence<sup>2</sup>. While slightly increasing their seats in the Lok Sabha till 1971, the CPI and CPM together have never won even 10% of the polled votes; the communist movement has also failed to make any significant headway in the important conservative Hindi belt.<sup>3</sup> Of late, the Socialists have lost their identity by merging in the

1. See for example N. Chakravartty, "The Communist Spectrum", in "Seminar" no 216, 1977, p. 51 ; "A Marxist View...", pp. 2-3 & 18 ; "For a Left Coalition of Activists for Democracy and Socialism," in MR vol X, 1977, pp. 325-7 ; and B. Roy, "For a Coming together of Marxist Forces", *ibid.*, pp. 350-7.
2. On this see Ajit Roy, "Some Critical Points About Communist Movement in India", in MR vol X, 1977, pp. 280-1 ; "New Correlation of Forces", *ibid.*, pp. 323-5 ; Gopal Acharya, "Rise of Ultra-Right Trends in India", in "A Marxist View...", pp. 83-90 ; and "Danger Signals", *ibid.*, pp. 19-24. The MR adds: "all major crucial turns in Indian politics in the decade gone by have evolved around the struggles between the Rightwing forces, with the Left playing a very subsidiary role." ("The Same Old Pattern", Vol X, 1977, p. 373).
3. For the configuration of the communist movement in India, see Chakravartty, *op. cit.*, p. 50.



Janata. Though Socialists may make a certain contribution in the Janata or Congress, the communists represent today the only independent leftist force in the country. In spite of welcome recent developments—the sweeping victories of the CPM in West Bengal and Tripura, the progressive efforts of the CPI to disentangle itself from the Congress and regain its leftist credentials, and the evolution of the Naxalites—the *CPI, CPM and CPI (M-L) are still far too weak and divided to provide a meaningful leftist alternative in India.*

As Biren Roy observed, "there is no doubt that the specific Indian path which can lead the revolutionary movement in India to... success has yet to be formulated."<sup>4</sup> It is therefore extremely important for the communists to ask themselves why the people have not accepted them more than they did and why they have not yet become the alternative. The present chapter critically examines the history of the communist movement in India under the following headings: "The CPI till the 1964 Split", "The CPI", "The CPM", "The CPI (M-L) and "The Future". *In the following pages, we shall try to understand better the present plight of the communist forces and, still more, to outline possible goals, strategies and tactics, for a successful Indian revolution.*

Before proceeding further, it might be good to draw attention to some of the major questions that were, and are, alive in Indian Communist circles. Wielenga sums them up as follows: "the character of state power, the role of the bourgeoisie in the struggle for independence and thereafter, the advantages and disadvantages of United Front politics from below or from above, the classes which could be included in United Front alliances, and the proper and effective means of struggle, be it participation in the parliamentary system or people's war."<sup>5</sup> The Editorial Board of "The Marxist Review" thus describes the left predicament; "In view of the... lessons from the experience of the revolutions during the last one hundred years, the task of the revolutionary vanguard in India is to determine: i) How to reach the point of challenging the rule of the exploiting classes in the course of *internal* development of class struggles, unrelated to the . . . hypothetical... factor of the country's involvement in some major and longdrawn war? ii) How to make use of the double-edged instrument of parliamentary democracy... ? iii) How to checkmate, minimise and prevent the use of the armed forces by the exploiting classes... against the forces of democracy and socialism and the latter's struggles for a radical restructuring of the society ?"<sup>6</sup>

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4. "Wynad is not the Indian Path to Revolution", in "A Marxist View...", p. 107.

5. "Marxist Views on India in Historical Perspective", CISRS, Bangalore, 1976, p. X.

6. "Notes on Indian Path to Revolution", in "A Marxist View...", p. 65.



## The Pre-Independence Movement<sup>7</sup>

Encouraged by the Russian Revolution (1917) and the setting up of the CI (1919), Indian communists founded the CPI in the early 1920s.<sup>8</sup> On Roy's suggestion, the CPI was soon recognised as a branch of the CI. In 1925, the British CI sent three experienced trade-unionists to India to help organizing the industrial workers. Facilitated by the Trade Union Act of 1926, their work met with success in big cities where the communists succeeded to build up a base. From the beginning, however, *the CPI met with harsh repression*. The British government in India indeed arrested several communists as early as 1925. It did the same with 31 prominent leaders in 1929; the four-year trial, in which the communists were supported by trade-union leaders, became the famous "Meerut Conspiracy Case". Various communists like Roy, Spratt, Bradley, Dange and Ahmed, gained much popularity during this trial.

*From the early twenties, the stand to be adopted by communists towards national liberation movements was debated.*<sup>9</sup> Against Lenin, Roy unsuccessfully opposed any collaboration at the Second Congress of the CI (1921). Influenced by a series of events, mainly in Russia and China, the Sixth Congress however denounced the national bourgeoisie in 1928. In their enthusiasm, young Indian communists—their leaders being in Jail—strictly followed these instructions, "called for a 'ruthless exposure' of the national reformism of the INC, actively opposed Gandhi's call to the masses for passive resistance against the colonial government, broke away from the AITUC (in 1931), and generally followed ultra-leftist policies".<sup>10</sup> They attacked Gandhi, Nehru, Bose and other leaders of the INC. Such policies led to further arrests and the official banning of the party in 1934 and began antagonizing various nationalist leaders.

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7. For this section, see Misra, Hiro (pp. 125-8), Gupta (pp. 386-90) and Ghose ("Socialism and Communism...", pp. 120-39 & 293-320). For a list of published documents on this period, and their review, see G. K. Lieten, "Indian Communists Look at Indian Communism", in EPW 1977, pp. 1606-11. Though Gupta is biased against Communists, his book contains several interesting facts and summaries of events.

8. The exact date is debated. For details, see Lieten, op. cit., pp. 1610-11.

9. On this question, see Ghose, pp. 294-301, and Lieten, pp. 1609-10.

10. Hiro, p. 126.



After the Seventh Congress of the CI (1935)—which asked communists to uphold parliamentary democracy against Hitler's fascism and to form a "united" front with nationalists against imperialism—and the famous Dutt-Bradley thesis on "The Anti-Imperialist People's Front in India" (1936), Indian communists decided to join the INC and CSP and to transform them from within. Though officially banned, the communists were welcomed into these organizations through the respective influence of Nehru and Bose, and J. P. Narayan. They merged their trade-union with the AITUC, actively collaborated with radical Congressmen to form the AIKS (1936), and captured important posts in trade-unions, the AISF, the INC and CSP. When they discovered communist documents which attacked the CSP as "not being socialist", JP and Masani however began criticizing the communists (1937 & 38). JP issued a "war circular" against them in 1939 and the CSP officially expelled them in 1940. The British authorities moreover used a heavy hand against the communists between 1939 and 1942 because of their opposition to the Second World War.

Both the INC and the CPI condemned Germany's attack on Russia in 1941. Yet, *the INC gave priority to India's struggle for Independence and, instead of backing the British, launched the "Quit India" movement in 1942. The communists, on the other hand, decided to support the Allied war-effort, which they considered a "people's war" against fascism*, the British government promptly lifted its ban on the party. While the nationalists were behind bars, the CPI took the leadership of the AITUC,<sup>11</sup> AIKS and AISF, and increased its membership from 5,000 in 1942 to over 30,000 in 1945. On their release in 1945, the nationalists strongly criticized the communists and accused them of putting the interests of Russia before those of India. The CWC thus expelled the communists from the INC. The CPI support, since 1942, of the Muslim League's demand for the creation of Pakistan on the ground of self-determination was also widening the gulf between the INC and the CPI. In spite of Dutt's reconciliation efforts in 1946 and of the initial communist welcome of the Independence, the 1945-47 period was mainly marked by tensions between the INC and the CPI.

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11. From then onward, the AITUC became a communist trade-union. Congressmen formed the INTUC in 1947 and the Socialists, the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat in 1948.



It might be good to add a few words on the manifold and changing views of Indian marxists on Gandhi.<sup>12</sup> *The rather negative attitude of Roy and of the CPI between 1928 and 1955 was, to a great extent, challenged afterwards.* In 1969 S. G. Sardesai for example admitted that the CPI "could never grasp Gandhi and Gandhism in their totality". He then added "With all his medieval social theories which, in the contemporary context, were theories of class collaboration, Gandhi knew and understood India better than we did in many vital respects."<sup>13</sup> Wielenga thus sums up his analysis: "In the Marxist assessment of Gandhi various aspects can be distinguished: (a) his reactionary religious-philosophical outlook and the socio-political concepts connected with it; (b) his progressive role as the leader of the anti-imperialist struggle for independence who succeeded in mobilizing the masses; (c) the opponent of class-struggle who secured the supremacy of the Indian bourgeoisie; (d) the saintly leader who by his identification with the masses gave the moral motivation for their mobilization."<sup>14</sup> According to Wielenga, Hemen Ray well expresses the present marxist position towards *Gandhi, the progressive patriot*: "Basically Gandhi played a positive role in the development of a national liberation movement. It was precisely as a result of Gandhi's activity as a leader of the INC that the organisation was transformed into a mass party. Our unconditionally negative attitude toward Gandhi's non-violent tactics have been refuted by the facts. The National Congress adopting these tactics under conditions of a general stirring of the anti-Imperialist movement, succeeded in inspiring very broad, and also backward masses for the struggle."<sup>15</sup> Yet today's marxists remain critical of *Gandhi, the opponent of class struggle*. Mukerjee and Namboodiripad for example "show in historical detail his (Gandhi's) reluctance to take up the demands of workers and peasants, his opposition to the weapon of strike and of non-payment of rent to the landlords, his restriction of the masses which he awakened, his tactics of mobilising pressure for a bargain instead of organising a fight to the finish."<sup>16</sup> Had it come earlier, this more positive

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12. For excellent summaries, see B. Wielenga (op. cit., pp. 113-136) and Ghose ("Socialism and Communism...", pp. 120-39, and "Socialism, Democracy...", pp. 437-55). For more details, see H. Mukerjee, "Gandhiji", PPH, 1958; E. M. S. Namboodiripad, "The Mahatma and the Ism", PPH, 1958; and M. B. Rao (ed), "The Mahatma : A Marxist Symposium", PPH, 1969.

13. M. B. Rao (ed), op. cit., p. 50; quoted by Wielenga, pp. 113-4.

14. p. 114.

15. "Indo-Soviet Relations 1955-71", Bombay, 1975, p. 257, quoted *ibid.*, p. 125.

16. Wielenga, p. 131.



and nuanced understanding of Gandhi would have greatly helped the CPI I

The pre-Independence marxists succeeded to recruit almost 90,000 members<sup>17</sup> and to build up the bases of the communist movement in India. They were right in emphasizing that true freedom for the masses requires the radical transformation of the socio-economic structures of the country. That they were also right in criticizing the weakness of the INC and its leaders in this regard has been clearly proved by the Congress performance after Independence. The communists however failed to link their movement with the Indian heritage<sup>18</sup> and to acknowledge the genuine possibilities of non-violent action and the positive role of the nationalists.<sup>19</sup> As they came to recognise it later, these were major mistakes. Their greatest mistake however lies in their collaboration with the British during the "Quit India" movement: "There is not the remotest doubt that the overwhelming majority of Indian patriotic opinion thought that when the country was fighting for independence 'the communists were on the other side'. We paid very dearly for this in the years to come..."<sup>20</sup>

### The CPI Till the 1964 Split<sup>21</sup>

In mid-1974, Russian theoreticians and leaders began criticizing Nehru and the INC. In Dec 1974, the CC of the CPI denounced the Mountbatten Plan and attacked the bourgeoisie as a whole. Taking the lead from the South East Asian Youth Conference, the CPI Congress met in Calcutta on Feb 28, 1948 and adopted the following "political thesis": "Though the bourgeois leadership parades the story that independence has been won, the fact is that *the freedom struggle has been betrayed* and the national leadership has struck a treacherous deal behind the back of the starving people, betraying every slogan of the democratic revolution... *The leaders of the Government...*

17. Hiro quotes this as a 1948 figure (p. 128).

18. This was admitted by the CPI in 1967 (S. G. Sardesai, "India and the Russian Revolution", CPI Publication, 1967, pp. 60-1), quoted by Ghose, "Socialism and Communism...", pp. 307-8.

19. On this, see S. G. Sardesai, op. cit., pp. 62-3, quoted by Ghose, p. 307.

20., ibid., pp. 99-100, quoted by Ghose, p. 315.

21. For this section, see Hiro (pp. 128-34), Ghose (pp. 320-59), and Gupta (pp. 390-412).



*represent the interests of the Indian capitalist class. The bourgeoisie... has renounced mass struggle to get concessions from imperialism. Henceforward, the march of the democratic revolution will have to proceed directly in opposition to the bourgeois government and its policies and the bourgeois leadership of the Congress.*"<sup>22</sup> The CPI further condemned "the illusion that socialism may be achieved by constitutional means" and replaced, as its General Secretary, the moderate Joshi by the radical Ranadive, who promised to organize an "October 1917" revolution in India. Judging India on the verge of a revolution, Ranadive used the insurrectionary method, especially in West Bengal, Madras, Travancore-Cochin, and Hyderabad. In retaliation, the party and its trade-unions were declared illegal in various parts of the country, its newspapers were banned, and leaders such as Jyoti Basu, A. Ghosh, Ahmed, and Dange were arrested. Progressively, however, the last three leaders along with several others, began opposing Ranadive's adventurist and ultra-leftist policies.

*The Andhra communists, on the other hand, were following the Chinese method of starting the revolution in villages and of creating revolutionary pockets.* They believed that revolution would come through "dogged resistance and prolonged civil war". This path was recommended by both Soviet academicians and the Trade Union Conference of Asian and Australasian countries in 1949, and the Andhrate C. R. Rao replaced Ranadive in 1950. "In Telengana, the party succeeded in establishing *communes*, complete with the people's courts and militia, in 3,000 villages covering 16,000 square miles, a development which brought violent reprisals from the Central Government. The 50,000 to 60,000 troops deployed by the Nehru administration crushed the movement in two years, from late 1948 to late 1950, by... killing nearly 4,000 communist and militant peasants, and arresting another 10,000 communists and their sympathizers."<sup>23</sup> The Andhra communists however persevered with their guerilla methods, while Joshi, Dange, Ghosh and their followers, increasingly objected to them. The party membership fell to 20,000 in 1950.

*In the midst of debates and tensions, the CPI progressively revised its methods.* In October 1950, the British CP and Dutt respectively recommended legal modes of struggle and a

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22. Parts of this document are respectively quoted by Ghose, pp. 321-2, and Gupta, p. 391. The italics are ours.

23. Hiro, p. 128. In this passage, we replaced the words "village soviets" by the more exact "communes". Hiro takes these figures from EPW 1973, pp. 1027 & 1031. Other authors give different, but also impressive, statistics.



certain "democratic front" with Nehru. In December, Dange, Ghosh, Rao and Basavapunniah, went to Moscow for consultation and approved a "peaceful approach" as a temporary strategy. In July 1951, the centrist Ghosh succeeded Rao as General Secretary. In October, the CPI decided to contest the forthcoming general elections and finalised its "tactical line": *"to forge a united front with any and every 'progressive' organization in the country in order to isolate and combat the two main enemies of the Indian people—foreign imperialist forces and their agents, the Indian monopoly capitalists..."* The party formally called off its militant peasant movement in Telengana, and decided to restrict popular agitations in the future to those which fell within the constitutional framework",<sup>24</sup> till the situation becomes ripe for the revolution. In relation to its unhappy experiences with the Russian and Chinese approaches, the CPI declared: "Both the lines in practice meant ignoring the task of building the alliance of the working class and the peasantry... of putting the working class at the head of this (United) Front in the liberation struggle."<sup>25</sup>

At the 1951-52 general elections, the communists emerged as the largest opposition party. They also gained 6.04% of the polled votes and 181 seats in various State assemblies. The shrewd Nehru however prevented them from forming a united Front government in Madras. The ban on the CPI was lifted and the detenues released. All this strengthened the hold of the moderates on the party and the 1953 Madurai Session exhorted communists not to neglect "lawful activities". At Palghat in 1956, the CPI "decided that *the party would not attack the Congress indiscriminately but would distinguish the reactionary forces from the anti-imperialist and democratic forces inside the Congress and would support the latter against the former.*"<sup>26</sup> In the light of Khrushchev's more positive attitude towards the USA and India, the CPI also began to support the international peace policy of Nehru and to move closer to the Congress. In 1957, the CP of the USSR defended the famous theory of "peaceful transition to socialism". The CPI further improved its position in the 1957 general and State assembly elections and even came to power in Kerala, thus achieving the

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24. Hiro, p. 129. The italics are ours.

25. Official statement, quoted by Hiro, p. 129.

26. Ghose, p. 332. The italics are ours.



first communist victory in the world through the ballot box.<sup>27</sup> At its 1958 Amritsar Congress, the CPI made conscious efforts to apply "the theory of Marxism-Leninism to the realities of the Indian situation" and added a new clause to its Constitution: *"The CPI strives to achieve full democracy and Socialism by peaceful means. It considers that by developing a powerful mass movement, by winning a majority in Parliament and by backing it with mass sanctions, the working class and its allies can overcome the resistance of the forces of reaction and ensure that Parliament becomes an instrument of people's will for effecting fundamental changes in the economic, social, and State structure."*<sup>28</sup> This was a far cry from Ranadive and Rao!

Time has now come to consider *the 1964 communist split, which climaxed "a battle of programmes for a period of more than ten years."*<sup>29</sup> We already mentioned the clashes of Joshi, Dange and Ghosh, with the radical Ranadive and Rao, as well as the tensions between the Russian and Chinese approaches, which were somewhat resolved by the 1951 compromise. The Madurai, Palghat and Amritsar meetings did not either fully satisfy the leftists: they wanted to dislodge the imperialist and capitalist Nehru government in order to establish a "people's democracy" and believed that the Parliament could never be transformed into a genuine instrument of the people's will, for the ruling classes never give up power voluntarily, but rather use force. Disagreements also arose on the Russian invasion of Hungary (1958), the Sino-Indian border dispute (1959), and the problems of language, regionalism and foreign capital. In 1961, the leftists were excluded from the CPI National Executive. The discussion on the CPI's attitude towards the Congress revealed further differences. Yet, at the death of the centrist Ghosh, a certain compromise was reached: the rightist Dange and leftist Namboodiripad were

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27. Though moderate in its policies, this communist government was summarily dismissed in mid-1959. When the Nair Service Society and the Catholic Church, encouraged by the Congress, opposed the educational reform bill and created unrest, the Centre imposed President's rule. On this, see Hiro, pp. 131-2 & 143.

28. Quoted by Ghose, p. 338, and Hiro, p. 131. The italics are ours. In the same year, Ghosh even stated: "We consider that in the present historical condition, the possibility exists... of parties and elements, who stand for socialism, securing a majority in Parliament, and overcoming the resistance of reaction by means of mass action. And we shall try our utmost to make this possibility a reality in our country" (quoted by Hiro, p. 125). A post-split CPI publication said in 1968: "Communists do not make a fetish of either violence or non-violence. They work for revolution, if possible, in a peaceful form but, if necessary, through armed civil war." (quoted by Ghose, p. 401).

29. Ninan Koshy, in Chatterji (ed), p. 56. The italics are ours.



respectively elected Chairman and General Secretary of the CPI, while the leftists Sundarayya, Basu, and Surjeet, were included in an enlarged Executive. In 1962, the CPI, ignoring the leftist views, officially condemned the "Chinese attack on the motherland". Shortly afterwards, hundreds of Party radicals were arrested by the Nehru government and the rightists strengthened their hold on the party. The split was formalized in 1964 in the midst of debates on the famous Dange letters.

## The CPI<sup>30</sup>

At the time of the split, the CPI viewed the independence of India as "a historic event" that set the country on the "path of independent development". Though inadequate, the overall economic progress meant the "consolidation of political independence and a step forward to economic regeneration". The Indian State was "the organ of the class rule of the national bourgeoisie as a whole, in which the big bourgeoisie holds powerful influence". This big bourgeoisie had to be fought. *"The CPI was for forging an alliance of four classes—working class, toiling peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, and the non-big bourgeoisie—with the aim of ushering in a 'National Democratic' state,.... (that is) one that has won complete economic independence from imperialism and is ruled by a broad anti-imperialist front that includes the national bourgeoisie"*.<sup>31</sup> In this transitional stage, any opponent of the imperialists, the landlords and the Indian monopolists can help the revolutionary struggle. The primary contradiction lies between imperialism/feudalism and the people, and the secondary one only between the national bourgeoisie and the people. Denouncing its past mistakes of total opposition to the Congress between 1928-34, 1942-44 and 1948-51, *the CPI therefore pursued a policy of "unity as well as struggle" with the INC with the hope that progressive congressmen would join the national democratic front.* The CPI moreover felt that, notwithstanding its limitations, parliamentary

30. For this section, see Hiro (pp. 135-47), Ghose (pp. 395-413), and Gupta (pp. 412-20.) For recent developments, see for example, "Communist Movement in India Since the Split", in "A Marxist View...", pp. 2-18; Biren Roy, "Cochin Congress of CPI (1971)—An Evaluation", *ibid.*, pp. 158-67; S. Das Gupta "CPI Still on Collaborationist Trail", in *MR* vol X, 1977, pp. 388-95; and B. Roy, "CPI's Half-truths, Evasion and Self-deception", *ibid.*, Vol XI, 1977, pp. 82-91. As a whole, Mohit Sen ("Revolution in India—Path and Problems", PPH, Delhi, 1977), defends CPI's policies. The 1977 CPI manifesto and its official introduction can be found in Sharda Paul (pp. 165-76).

31. Hiro, p. 136. For the CPI's plan of action, see Ghose, p. 412.



democracy had brought some real power to the masses. In the main, the party thus favoured peaceful methods in the present stage of the struggle in India and supported the Congress policies on international peace.

In practice, the CPI progressively came closer to the USSR, became an ally of the INC, and spent much of its energy to defeat the CPM. In 1969, the party welcomed the Congress split—interpreted as a “rift within the class of the bourgeoisie”—, supported the minority government of Indira and tried to “infiltrate” the INC and lead it towards socialism. The party helped the INC to overthrow the CPM-led ministries in Kerala (1969) and West Bengal (1970), entered into electoral alliances with the Congress in the 1971 and 1972 elections, and subsequently joined hands with it to form ministries in Kerala and West Bengal. The CPI-led Kerala government moreover made extensive use of the police force to suppress various agitations. In 1974, the CPI extended its support to the Congress to defeat the country-wide railway strike and to suppress the CPM bandh in West Bengal. In its desire to prevent an extreme rightist take-over, the party also threw all its might against the JP movement in 1974-75. In spite of occasional tensions with the Congress and protests against abuses,<sup>32</sup> the CPI fully supported the emergency. On account of these “tailist” policies, certain humourists dubbed the CPI as the “Communist Party of Indira”. It is not therefore surprising that the party shared the fate of the Congress in the 1977 general elections and won only seven seats.

Nine months after the elections, Dange—the main architect of the CPI policy of collaboration with the Congress—resigned from the Chairmanship of the party. In December 24-28, 1977, *the National Council of the CPI recognized that it had been “wrong” to support the emergency*. The Council now interpreted the emergency as follows: “Resolving capitalist crisis at the expense of the common people to the glee of the monopolists and imperialists was clearly one of the aims of Mrs. Gandhi in imposing the Emergency. Other aims were to undermine the parliamentary democratic set-up, change our Constitution to the presidential system, establish her personal rule and make her son Sanjay Gandhi the successor. For all this, attacking the left and democratic parties and forces was to be pursued”.<sup>33</sup> While denouncing the CPM’s alliance with the Janata, the CPI now pledged to work for unity and joint action

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32. For details, see Gupta, pp. 415-9. To be fair, it should be added that the CPI 1977 manifesto strongly denounced the Congress (Sharda Paul, pp. 170-1).

33. “Support to Emergency Wrong, CPI now feels”, in “The Indian Express”, Dec 31, 1977, p. 1.



of left parties and all leftist and democratic forces, including those in the Congress and Janata. According to press reports, the Bhatinda Congress (March 31-April 7) basically reasserted these policies. In spite of tensions, the CPI kept its unity and reelected Dange and Rao as Chairman and General Secretary. The party however failed to seriously criticize its participation in the Congress-led coalition government in Kerala and its relationship with Russia. As a whole, the Bhatinda Congress disappointed the staunch supporters of unity with the CPM.

## The CPM<sup>34</sup>

At its inception in 1964, the CPM viewed Independence as "a mere settlement" between British imperialism and the Congress. The party thought that India was developing along path of capitalism "which meant transforming feudal exploiters at home into capitalist exploiters, and creating greater co-operation between the big bourgeoisie in India and the monopolistic or oligopolistic corporations in the imperialist countries".<sup>35</sup> The Indian State was seen as "the organ of the class-rule of the bourgeois and the landlords, led by the big bourgeois". The government had not only to be purified of the reactionary forces, but also to be overthrown. In the light of this analysis, *the CPM "was for forming an alliance of three classes—working class, toiling peasantry, and petty bourgeoisie—with the objective of ushering in a 'People's Democratic' state."*<sup>36</sup> On account of its vacillating character, the national bourgeoisie was not to be given any leading part in the people's democratic front; the working class itself was to assume the leadership. *The CPM therefore adopted a strong anti-Congress stand.*<sup>37</sup>

34. For this section, see Hiro (pp. 135-47), Ghose (pp. 414-38) and Gupta (pp. 420-8). For recent developments in the CPM, see "Communist Movement in India since the Split", op. cit., C. R. Das, "Debacle in the Red City", in "A Marxist View...", pp. 132-40; G. Acharya, "CPI(M)—From Pragmatism to Opportunism", in MR vol X, 1977, pp. 396-407; Editorials, "Unbecoming Echo" and "Pragmatic Limitations", ibid., vol XI, pp. 1-5 & 99-102; B. Roy, "CPI(M)'s Tardy Advance", ibid., vol XI, 1977, pp. 142-44 & 202-4. The 1977 CPM manifesto and its official introduction can be found in Sharda Paul (pp. 177-96).

35. Hiro, p. 135-6.

36. Ibid., p. 136. The italics are ours.

37. The Communist Unity Committee thus criticized the 1964 stand of the CPM: "The Programme of the 'Left' is generally sectarian in outlook. Though its criticism of the bourgeoisie is more or less correct, it overemphasises its pro-imperialist and pro-feudal role and almost completely ignores its contradictions



*The 1964 CPM moreover insisted on the organization of the masses—through peaceful methods at this stage of the revolution—rather than on the exercise of parliamentary democracy. Contrary to Khrushchev and the CPI, the party did not cease either to believe in the inevitability of war! "Wars can be eliminated and lasting peace secured only when imperialism is eliminated; as long as imperialism exists, there will be soil for wars of aggression."*<sup>38</sup> The CPM looked on Khrushchev as the father of "modern revisionism" and considered the foreign policy of Nehru as fraught with "compromise and conciliation with imperialism". The CPM therefore accused the CPI of betraying the working class—and marxism—and of being revisionist, collaborationist and opportunist.

On January 1, 1965, the government arrested more than 900 CPM leaders under the Defence of India Rules—on the charge of promoting "an internal revolution to synchronize with a fresh Chinese attack"—and kept them in preventive detention till April-May 1966. The Chinese, on the other hand, hoped that the CPM would follow their approach. For about two years, the CPM avoided taking a clear stand, as most of its leaders were in jail. In the wake of the "Cultural Revolution" (1966), China began to build up "a Maoist line for India". The CPM officially discarded this approach in 1967. Pointing out the vast differences between 1967 India and 1927 China, the party stressed that the Indian revolution was not principally in an anti-imperialist stage and refused to give up its main struggle against the national bourgeoisie. While defending the inevitability of war, the CPM reiterated its 1964 stand that parliamentary and democratic institutions are to be defended and "skilfully utilized in combination with extra-parliamentary activities" and decided, after much debate, to contest the forthcoming elections and to take part in coalition ministries. In short, the CPM tried to "apply Marxism-Leninism to its

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with imperialism and feudalism. This Programme almost negates the national development that has taken place since 1947. Though it declares that the stage of the revolution is anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and democratic, it almost denies the possibility of any alliance with the bourgeoisie. Its outlook regarding United Front is extremely narrow... So, the programmatic outlook of the 'Right' leads to trailing behind or depending upon the bourgeoisie, and of the 'Left' to the isolation of the working class from the allies." (quoted in "Communist Movement..", pp. 4-5) Between 1967 and 1970, the CPM slightly altered its analysis and became more positive towards the national bourgeoisie (ibid. pp. 8-9 & 12-3).

38. Statement of the CC of the CPM, 1967, quoted by Ghose, p. 422. Later on the CC criticized the 1969 Moscow Conference for deleting "Leninism teaches, and experience confirms, that the ruling classes never relinquish power voluntarily" (1969 Statement, quoted by Ghose, p. 430).



problems, irrespective of the Chinese-Soviet differences, and develop its own revolutionary movement."<sup>39</sup> In this way, *the CPM became one of the few communist parties of the world that remained independent from both Moscow and Peking.*

After these theoretical precisions, let us now consider the main events of this period. It might be good to begin with a few words on *the United Fronts of Kerala and, especially, West Bengal.*<sup>40</sup> In 1967, the CPM emerged as the largest party in Kerala (52 out of 133 seats) and West Bengal (43 out of 280 seats) and entered into UF ministries. On account of dissensions, the CPM-led UF ministry (Namboodiripad) of Kerala fell in October 1969 and was replaced by the CPI-led UF ministry (Achutha Menon); in the 1970 mid-term poll, the Menon ministry increased its power. In West Bengal, a UF government was formed in March 1967 with three CPM ministers (out of 18). "Within the first fifty *days*, this government had decided to reduce municipal taxes on slum houses; vest refugees from East Pakistan, staying in squatter colonies, with legal rights; increase dearness allowance of teachers and State government employees; fix minimum wages in thirteen important industries; instruct the police not to interfere in the 'legitimate trade union movement'; impose a moratorium on taxes and cesses in drought-stricken areas; and grant proprietorial rights over homestead land to landless labourers and poor peasants."<sup>41</sup> Before its fall in Nov 1967, the UF had distributed 2,48,000 acres of surplus land to the poor peasants.

On account of popular demonstrations, elections were held in 1969. The CPM then increased its strength to 80 seats and secured important ministries in the UF government, especially land revenue, home portfolio and police (Jyoti Basu), labour and education. During its brief life of 13 months, the land revenue department succeeded to distribute about 3,00,000 acres of land. "This was done either by the department taking over the landlords' excess land, an unprecedented act, or by detecting *malafide* transfers of land... and then encouraging the rural poor

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39. 1971 Statement of the CPM Politbureau, quoted by Hiro, p. 142. After 1967, China accused the CPM of revisionism, while the latter said China had "derailed into dogmatism and sectarianism." The CPM also spoke of left adventurism and opportunism.

40. On this, see for example Ghose (pp. 362-94) and Gupta (pp. 322-38). On West Bengal, see also Hiro (pp. 165-80) and Ajit Roy ("Political Power..." op. cit., pp. 63-129). Roy's study is not however confined to West Bengal

41. Hiro, p. 168.

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to occupy these lands"<sup>42</sup> and to cultivate them. On the industrial front, similar successes were achieved, partly through gheraos, and nearly 7,50,000 employees in jute, tea, textile and engineering industries got significant wage increases. The police was moreover instructed not to interfere in employer-employee and landlord-peasant disputes unless violence erupted. The CPM popularity grew so much that the party received 4,00,000 applications for membership in 1969; of these, 7,000 were accepted as members and 92,000 as "sympathisers". Meanwhile, however, tensions grew within the CPM and the extremists or naxalites officially formed the CPI (M-L) in 1969.

On account of dissensions, rightist reactions, and the famous Mukherjee-Basu confrontation, the UF government fell in March 1970. Under the guise of President's rule, the Centre then encouraged tensions between the CPM and the naxalites and began to curb their activities. Fresh elections were again held in March 1971 on account of popular pressures. The UF lost a substantial section of its supporters in the last two weeks of the campaign because the CPM was falsely accused of the political murder of the popular H. K. Basu. Yet, the UF managed to get 123 seats, of which the CPM bagged 108. With Congress support, Mukherjee formed a short-lived anti-CPM government. President's rule was, once again, imposed in June till the 1972 elections. Often under the pretext of controlling the "naxalite menace", the Youth Congress, the police and the "resistance squads", attacked the CPM. It is estimated that, between 1970 and 1972, about 1,000 CPM cadres were killed and 40,000 party members and sympathizers chased out of their homes. The press and radio intensified their pro-Congress propaganda and the polls were rigged on a large scale. The "election" results: the Congress boosted its strength from 105 to 216 seats, while the CPM's seats declined from 108 to 14! After assuming power, the Congress continued its reprisals against the CPM.

On the national plane, the CPM generally supported the Congress in parliament between 1969 and 1971, for it feared the other alternative of right-wing parties. After the 1971 and 1972 elections and the events in West Bengal, the CPM strongly opposed the Indira government, constantly chided the CPI for its alliance with the Congress, and somewhat joined hands with the SP (1973). In spite of its deep-rooted reluctance to collaborate with the JS and SWA, the CPM extended its "all-out support" to the JP movement in 1974-75. It also opposed the Emergency, but failed to efficiently organize the masses against it. At the time of the 1977 elections, the CPM

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42. *ibid.*, p. 169.



realised the weakness of the left and supported opposition forces in view of inflicting "a crushing defeat on the Congress", which it considered the immediate and primary task. The party did not however entertain illusions on "a united front or electoral alliance with the Janata and the CFD as fundamental divergencies in class policies separate the CPI-M from these parties."<sup>43</sup> After the Janata triumph, the CPM was inclined to overstress the dangers of a Congress comeback and to bypass the rather similar class character of the Janata. Some humorists have even rechristened the CPM as the "Communist Party of Morarji". Of late, however, the party is progressively becoming more critical of the Janata.

In the wake of the Janata wave, the CPM won 22 seats in the Lok Sabha against the meagre 7 of the CPI. The party gains were still more spectacular in the Assembly elections of March 1977: its total representation went up from 19 to 204 seats. The CPM moreover secured an absolute majority in West Bengal (178 out of 294 seats) and, in December, in Tripura (49 seats out of 60). The party bagged another 28 seats in the February State elections (against 15 of the CPI).

At present, the CPM understands its participation in State governments as follows: *"Even while keeping before the people the task of dislodging the present ruling classes and establishing a new democratic state and government based on the firm alliance of the working class and peasantry, the Party will utilise all the opportunities that present themselves of bringing into existence governments pledged to carry out a modest programme of giving immediate relief to the people.* The formation of such a government will give great fillip to the revolutionary movement of the working people and thus help the process of building the democratic front. It, however, would not solve the economic and political problems of the nation in any fundamental manner. The Party, therefore, will continue to educate the mass of the people..."<sup>44</sup> The mellowed militancy of the CPM

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43 M. Basavapunniah, 'Introducing CPI-M Manifesto', in Sharda Paul, p. 180. Later, Basavapunniah wrote, 'The CPI(M) was and is supporting the Janata since it looks upon the Janata Party as the major political force in the battle for the defence of democratic rights and civil liberties of the people, and in defeating the dangerous forces of authoritarianism and dictatorship represented by the Congress Party'. (quoted in "Pragmatic Limitations", op. cit., p. 100).

44. Programme of the Party, section 112, quoted in MR XI, 1978, pp. 263-4. The italics are ours. For details on the CPM victory, performance and prospects in West Bengal, see Mirchandani, pp. 228-9; "Bengal: Return of the Pink Panther", in "Perspective" Aug 1977, pp. 9-12; B. Sen Gupta, "What can You Expect from the Left Rule in West Bengal", ibid., Sept 1977, pp. 3-6, "Profile of the CPI-M M.L.A.", ibid., Nov 1977, pp. 20-2, and "Peasant Mobilisation in West Bengal", ibid., Jan & Feb 1978; M Bakshi, "Our Face is Turned to Villages",



governments in Tripura and West Bengal however creates certain tensions with the more revolutionary party cadres and trade union leaders. It may even lead some of them to move closer to the CPI (M-L). Yet, the tenth Congress of the party, held at Jullundur (April 2-7, 1978), reasserted the basic orientations of the CPM.

### The CPI (M-L) or the Naxalites<sup>45</sup>

Before assessing the ideology of the CPI (M-L), let us briefly survey this movement. We have already mentioned that the Andhra communists adopted the Chinese approach between 1948-51. At the 1964 Conference of the CPM, some radical delegates wanted to create "an underground armed militia to work in conjunction with the overground party organization",<sup>46</sup> but their proposal was defeated. The radicals were also out-voted when they opposed the CPM's participation in the 1967 UFs of Kerala and West Bengal. On March 3, 1967, the pro-Peking CPM leader and General Secretary of the Kisan Sabha, H. Konar, convened a meeting of the Sabha which decided to start a "land-grab movement." Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal then directed a group of landless peasants to occupy some land near Naxalbari, a village in Darjeeling. On account of the CPM, the UF exercised much restraint in dealing with the situation, even when the peasants turned violent and created "liberated areas". In June, the Peking Radio approved the movement and declared: "Since, 'like pre-liberation China, India is a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country', the Indian

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ibid., Sept 1977, pp. 6-8; "Bengal Scenario", in "Seminar" no 220, 1977; "Tight-Rope Walking", in EPW, 1977, p. 1530; "West Bengal", ibid., pp. 1561-6; N. K. Chandra, "West Bengal Land Reforms Bill", ibid., pp. 1965-7; B. Roy, "The Government of the United Front—A Marxist Perspective", and "Six Months of Left Rule in West Bengal", in MR vol XI, 1977 & 1978, pp. 36-44, 258-64 & 292-6, "Promode Dasgupta", in "Perspective", April 1978, pp. 8-14; and "India Today", April 1-15, 1978, pp. 48-53. As a whole, Gupta is very enthusiastic about the Bengal ministry, while Roy is much more critical.

45. On this, see Hiro (pp. 148-64); Ghose (pp. 439-54); Gupta (pp. 429-36); the two books of A. K. Roy: "The Spring Thunder and After: A Survey of the Maoist and Ultra leftist Movements in India, 1962-1975", Minerva Associates Publications Pvt Ltd, Calcutta, 1975, and "Communism in Asia. A Study in Strategy and Tactics", Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 1976 (the latter contains several circulars of Charu Mazumdar, pp. 104-33); and the following articles (in "A Marxist View..."): B. Roy, "Wynad is not the Indian Path to Revolution", pp. 104-10; Ajit Roy, "Politics' of Eastern Frontier Rifles", pp. 111-21; B. Roy, "CPI(M-L) and Mao's Classical Thought", pp. 122-31; B. Rao, "Russian Marxists' Fight Against Individual Terrorism", pp. 141-57; and B. Roy, "Naxalism in Historical Perspective", in MR vol X, 1977, pp. 379-87.

46. Hiro, p. 148.



people, in order to liberate themselves, 'must proceed along the path pointed out by Comrade Mao, the path carved out by the Chinese people... *the road of armed revolution to oppose armed counter-revolution, the establishment of rural bases, the concentration of forces in the villages, using villages to encircle the cities and then, finally, the taking—over of the cities*'."<sup>47</sup> When the police finally moved into the area, the activists disappeared and the people offered no resistance. By October 1967, everything was "normal".

Enthused by the Naxalbari struggle, various CPM militants formed the All India Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries in 1968. They were expelled from the CPM and Mazumdar became their chief theoretician. A "liberated zone" of almost 300 villages (500 to 700 square miles) was then created around Srikakulam, a tribal area of Andhra. The Revolutionaries founded the CPI (M-L) in 1969. *This new party fully accepted the "maoist line" for India and decided to boycott elections. Since it considered the country ripe for revolution, the CPI (M-L) organized guerilla squads to physically annihilate class enemies.* "The annihilation of class enemy is the higher form of class struggle while the act of annihilating class enemies through guerrilla actions is the primary stage of the guerrilla struggle."<sup>48</sup> In retaliation, the Andhra government used its armed police and ten companies of the Central Reserve Police, arrested thousands of people and kept them under preventive detention (without specified charges), and shot real or pseudo-naxalites under the guise of "encounters".<sup>49</sup> The naxalites then progressively turned towards secret conspiracy and individual murders.

*By mid-1970, the naxalite attempts at creating various centres of "armed resistance" in Srikakulam and Musahari (Bihar)<sup>50</sup> as well as in Debra and Gopiballavpur (West Bengal) had failed.* These last three campaigns had concentrated on the physical liquidation of landlords and involved a large number of students. The naxalite movement then shifted to cities, especially Calcutta—there were nearly 700 "active squads" in the city—and

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47. Quoted by Hiro, p. 150. The italics are ours.

48. Charu Mazumdar, quoted by Hiro, p. 153.

49. See for example: "'Encounters' are Murders. A Documentation of the 'Naxalite' Policy of the A. P. Government", issued by Civil Rights (Tarkunde) Committee, Booklinks Corporation, Hyderabad, 1977; and "'Encounters' are Murders: Tarkunde Report", in EPW, 1977, pp. 827-9.

50. In 1968-69, the naxalites claimed that the "liberated area" of Musahari comprised about 50,000 people. Contrary to the three other zones, Musahari was not predominantly tribal.



legitimized lightning raids, even without mass support, as "revolutionary actions" that facilitated "India's march forward". Professional bullies or *mastans* as well as teenagers were recruited by the CPI (M-L), while police agents infiltrated their ranks. To the satisfaction of the Congress government, clashes became frequent with CPM cadres. In November 1970, a secret Chinese document to Mazumdar questioned the CPI (M-L) orientation: "Regarding the formulation that the open trade unions, open mass organizations, and mass movements are out of date, and taking to secret assassination as the only way: this idea needs rethinking."<sup>51</sup> Several naxalite leaders—such as T. Nagi Reddy (Andhra), S. N. Singh (Bihar), S. K. Misra (U.P.), Ashim Chatterjee (West Bengal) — also left the CPI (M-L), mainly on the grounds that India was not ready for a revolution and that the people's war should be better organized. By 1971-72, 19 of the 22 top leaders of the movement had been either arrested or killed. Mazumdar died in jail in 1972. There was a certain renewal of naxalite activities in 1974-75, but they were crushed during the Emergency.

Whatever be one's verdict on naxalite methods, certain facts that explain the tremendous impact of the movement, especially on the youth, have to be remembered. The naxalites indeed focused their attention on the sufferings and problems of the most oppressed, exploited and neglected sections of the Indian population and expressed their aspirations and strivings. In the beginning at least, large groups of people responded to their appeal. *The naxalites thus "brought to the fore the question of land-hungry peasants and urgently needed agrarian reforms" as well as "the need for supreme sacrifice—the need for courage in the course of revolution".*<sup>52</sup> Those who are convinced that the CPI and CPM lay too much emphasis on parliamentary struggles add that *the naxalites rightly refocused the attention of all on the questions of power and revolution, and the link between people's militant struggles and participation in parliament.* Though they made certain mistakes, the naxalites should not have been treated, in violation to the laws of the country, so inhumanly by the government and the police.

This having been said, *one has to strongly disagree with the CPI (M-L)'s analysis of the Indian situation and its revolutionary methods.* Far from being a neo-colonial country headed by a stooge government and trying to liberate itself from imperialism, India has become a capitalist bourgeois democracy—with, of course, many feudal remnants and imperialist ties—with a solidly entrenched national bourgeoisie. Today's India is indeed very different from the China of the 1920s and 1930s: the

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51. Quoted by Hiro, p. 161.

52. B. Roy, "Naxalism...", op. cit., pp. 380-1. The italics are ours.



country possesses a highly centralized economy, state, army and network of communications, as well as a bourgeois democratic system with parliamentary institutions; it is also more urbanized and industrialized; it is not in war with a foreign power, etc.<sup>53</sup> In such conditions, Chinese revolutionary methods, which non-marxists would also tend to criticize on moral grounds, cannot be transposed in India. Instead of fostering the revolution, terrorism and violence antagonize a large section of the population and promote the forces of reaction and conservatism.

*Critics have also rightly emphasized that naxalism contradicts the teachings of Marx, Lenin and even Mao.* Marx for example remarked that the capture of political power may be effected through peaceful and democratic means in certain countries like England and America.<sup>54</sup> Lenin clearly accepted the use of parliamentary methods as one of the forms of struggle<sup>55</sup> and strongly denounced individual terrorism.<sup>56</sup> "Despite the lack of any scope for open and legal forms of struggle in pre-revolutionary China, Mao himself never ruled out legal activities as a form of struggle."<sup>57</sup> In fact, naxalism goes against the one-hundred-year revolutionary experience of mankind.<sup>58</sup> The Chinese revolution in particular followed a very different course

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53. On differences between today's India and 1930s China, see for example "A Marxist View...", pp 66-8 & 108-10, and A. K. Roy, "Communism in Asia", op. cit., pp. 51 ff.
54. On this, see Ghose, pp. 273 & 452. Ajit Roy disagrees with such an interpretation ("Euro-Communism", in MR vol XI, 1977, pp. 165-6).
55. On this, see Ghose, p. 436 and A. K. Roy, "Communism...", p. 63 note 20. Lenin explicitly asked to combine all forms of struggle: "'Unless we learn to apply all methods of struggle, we may suffer grave and sometimes even decisive defeat... Inexperienced revolutionaries often think that legal methods of struggle are opportunist..., while illegal methods of struggle are revolutionary. That, however, is wrong.'" (quoted by Roy, pp. 65-6.)
56. On this subject, see Rao, "Russian Marxists' Fight ..", op. cit., especially pp. 147-57. In 1903, Lenin drafted the following resolution: "The Congress decisively rejects terrorism, i.e., the system of individual political assassinations, as being a method of political struggle which is most inexpedient at the present time, diverting the best forces from the urgent and imperatively necessary work of organisation and agitation, destroying contact between revolutionaries and the masses of the revolutionary classes of the population, and spreading both among the revolutionaries themselves and the population in general utterly distorted ideas of the aims and methods of struggle against the autocracy" (quoted p. 153).
57. A. K. Roy, op. cit., p. 64. The author cites Mao on this subject (pp. 64-5).
58. On this. see "A Marxist View...", pp. 62-6.



than naxalism: "It started first not by a few adventurists seizing arms and annihilating class enemies at random, but with a spate of general strikes of the workers, the militant actions of the students, the uprisings of the poor peasants in the countryside and with the splits in the armed forces of reaction. It spread also not by the show of guns alone, though this played a very important role, but by the winning of the masses, establishing of base areas and waging guerrilla warfare from these bases. As Mao Tse-tung himself declared, the three magic wands of Chinese revolution were armed struggle, the united front and the Chinese Communist Party."<sup>59</sup> In short, the naxalites are closer to Che Guevara than to Mao.

Today, the naxalite movement is split into several groups—at least six. "Efforts for a sort of regrouping are being made, some groups are attempting to self-critically analyse their past activities and reorientate themselves... No group has as yet come out with a clear programme and tactical approach based on the concrete conditions pertaining in the country."<sup>60</sup> Two years ago, the group of Satyanarain Sinha "denounced the annihilation campaign and individual terrorism: it correctly decided to work in mass organisations and to develop mass struggles on local and partial issues."<sup>61</sup> Yet, this group still believed that the country was now ripe for armed struggle... The fact that certain naxalite groups contested the 1977 elections and that they are organizing the people on various issues shows that some rethinking is going on in their circles...

## The Future

What is therefore the future of the communist parties in India? What contribution can they make to the country? What is their role in building socialism? To answer such questions, let us first of all draw certain lessons from past mistakes. This will then enable us to reflect further on the Indian path to revolution.

Three major criticisms, often heard in certain marxist circles, should be made. First, communism has suffered much from both leftist and rightist deviations and has thus fallen into the extremes of either isolationism or opportunist compromises. The over-critical stand of the communists against the Indepen-

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59. A. K. Roy, p. 51. In contrast to Mao, the naxalites neglected the masses and fell into isolationism and sectarianism.

60. G. Acharya, "Indian Communists in Quandary", in MR vol IX, 1976, p. 86.

61. B. Roy, "Naxalism...", op. cit., p. 385.



dence movement and its leaders—especially between 1928-34 and 1942-44—as well as the violent and adventurist policies of 1948-51 and the naxalite movement, have greatly damaged the cause of communism by antagonising numerous people, many important leaders included. These mistakes have led to repression, deprived communism from the support and collaboration of many socialists and rendered a broad united front impossible. On the other hand, the tailist collaboration of the CPI with the Congress and, to a lesser extent, of the CPM with the Janata, have diminished the revolutionary credentials of these parties. In varying degrees, both the CPI and CPM have also paid too much attention to the parliamentary process at the expense of solid educational and organizational political work among the working masses. Second, communism has been torn apart by various splits and weakened, as we just explained, by its insufficient collaboration with socialists and leftists on specific issues. Third, communism has failed to pay enough attention to Indian cultural traditions and specific problems as for example castes and languages.<sup>62</sup>

Certain guidelines for the future can also be drawn from the almost six decades of communist experience in India:

1. *The Indian communist movement should apply marxist principles to understand the concrete economic and political reality of the country as well as its pre-and post-Independence evolution, and to draw an Indian path to revolution, independently of Moscow and Peking.*
2. *It should emphasize educational and organizational political work among the masses and maintain a healthy tension between immediate and long-term goals.* It is of capital importance that the traps of parliamentarianism, trade-unionism, economism, reformism, and exclusive attention to short-term gains and goals, be avoided. *Communist efforts should be turned towards the overall socialist education of the masses*—namely, the creation of awareness regarding the exploitative social formation (the feudal, capitalist and other types of exploitation and their interrelationships), the need of structural changes to bring about an egalitarian society and of unity among the workers, the possibilities of a socialist economy, etc.—*and their organization to pursue long-term goals. This education-organization can be done only through struggles on immediate and concrete issues that affect the workers' lives. Hence the unending and fruitful tension between short and long-term objectives...* While

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62. On this, see for example Wielenga (op. cit., pp. X-XI & 146-7), and S. Das Gupta (in "A Marxist View...", pp. 97-9).



taking part in local or regional struggles, communists should also develop a national perspective and strategy for transition to socialism.

3. In another creative tension, *Indian communism should make use of parliamentary activities and mass organizations. Both the possibilities and limitations of parliamentary democracy must be recognized.* The Indian experience has indeed demonstrated the educative value of elections and the possibility for communists to capture power through the ballot. The CPM is now trying to combine governmental administration and people's mobilization in West Bengal; this policy can become more and more effective, especially if leftist forces succeed to come into power in other States and exercise a greater influence at the Centre. It is however clear that the best laws cannot be implemented without the radical transformation of the police, the army and the bureaucracy, and without the pressure of people's organizations. The communist movement has also to be extended to the whole of India. It is therefore imperative that parliamentary democracy neither absorbs the energy of the communists nor keeps them away from the masses.
4. *Indian communism should guarantee, in its vision of a new India and its long-term goals, economic equality and political and religious freedom.* It should specify the kinds of freedom it would foster and how the right to dissent would be existing in the country... This is extremely important, for the ideal of an egalitarian and socialist society possesses a great appeal in India, while the fear of a centralized and authoritarian government has been one of the main factors that prevented large sections of the masses and various national leaders like Gandhi and J. P. Narayan, from embracing communism.<sup>63</sup> An all-powerful and bureaucratic State is not the only possible communist model... *Much thinking therefore needs to be done on the type of society that is envisioned for India and on the concepts*

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63. Ghose indeed wrote: "Gandhi's antipathy to violence and his aversion to the power of the State made him an anti-communist" (p. 109). JP Narayan "rejected the communist ideology not merely because of his belief in the purity of means and disbelief in the justification of the use of violence to effect social revolution, but also because he was opposed to the socialization of the means of production by the state and to the establishment of a monolithic party rule and, further, because he wanted to establish a society based on complete political and economic decentralization." (pp. 114-5).



of freedom and "dictatorship of the proletariat",<sup>64</sup> to avoid both the abuses of power found in several communist countries and the failure of unrealistic communists in other places like Chile and Portugal, where legitimately elected regimes were overthrown by reactionary vested interests. A communist government has undoubtedly to be strong enough to implement its socio-economic policies and to defend itself against counter-revolutionary violence. This does not however imply an authoritarian and abusive regime.

5. *In the present stage of the revolution in India, communists should unambiguously renounce "armed struggle" and commit themselves to non-violent, but militant, extra-constitutional methods.* The success of the Indian government in repressing "armed revolution" between 1948-51 and 1967-72 as well as the lack of support of large sections of the population for these forms of struggle, indeed clearly show the inefficiency of violence in the present context. The Indian experience, on the other hand, has demonstrated the great possibilities of non-violent extra-constitutional means.<sup>65</sup>
6. While realistically foreseeing that semi-feudal and capitalist elements will most likely resort to violence in the future and preparing themselves for this eventuality, *Indian*,

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64. In fact, much rethinking and debate has been going on in the Italian, French, Spanish, British and Japanese CPs. On this, see the summary of the 1976 speeches of Berlinguer and Marchais in MR vol X, 1977, pp. 255-64, and Ajit Roy, "Euro Communism", *ibid.*, vol XI, pp. 68-81, 112-8, and 149-73. On Chile, see the articles of V. Teitelboim and A. Roy, *ibid.*, vol XI, pp. 270-91. Though we cannot discuss here the complex question of Eurocommunism, the following articles will surely interest our readers. The CPs of these countries insist on the overall democratic character of the socialist society they want to build: "This (character) involves full recognition and guarantees of individual and collective freedoms, the principles of the democratic organisation of the State, the plurality of political parties, with freedom of debate, trade union independence, religious freedom, freedom of expression, of culture and the arts and sciences... This choice is a matter of principle." ("Joint Communiqué" of the CPs of Britain and Italy, 1976, quoted pp. 74-5). The CPs of Italy and Japan also "reaffirmed that the future socialist society they envisage will provide full guarantee of political pluralism and freedom of speech, of thought, of religion, and worship, of expression and cultural and artistic activity." ("Joint Communiqué", quoted p. 75). For further explanations, see Marchais' speech quoted in vol X, p. 261. The French and Japanese CPs even renounced the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", in 1975. As a whole, Ajit Roy disagrees with Eurocommunism (pp. 156-73) and reminds us of the Chilean experience (pp. 288-91).

65. See above, pp. 27-9.



*communists should promote a "peaceful transition to socialism"*<sup>66</sup> *and place the burden of violence on their adversaries.* We do not exclude, like the Gandhians, violence in all circumstances; we do not either reject self-defence and the building-up of arms to use in case of necessity. It should indeed be acknowledged that the systematic repressive violence of exploiters has sometimes to be resisted by all possible measures... We simply state that communists must commit themselves to non-violent militant methods and give them priority, unless their adversaries resort to violence. The responsibility of initiating violence should thus fully be on the shoulders of the exploiters. On account of the popularity of Gandhism in the country, Indian communists must lay great emphasis on these principles in their education of the masses.

7. *Existing communist parties should seriously strive towards unity and the creation of a real left alternative in the country.*<sup>67</sup>

While preserving their identity, communist parties should collaborate with socialist and leftist forces and individuals on specific issues, a policy that is very far from a blanket-approval of a political party. We indeed fully endorse the following statement of "The Marxist Review": "The historic need today... is the immediate and bold projection of a third, Left-democratic focus for the popular forces to converge in..."<sup>68</sup> After insisting on the necessity of regrouping marxist forces, another Editorial rightly added:

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66. We often referred to this debated question in this chapter. On this, see also Ghose (pp. 138-9, 334-47, 400-1, 430-1 & 451-3), and Ajit Roy ("Eurocommunism", pp. 163-70). This question is very much alive among eurocommunists. "The Italian and French Communists hold that the march towards socialism and the building of a socialist society... must be achieved within the framework of a continuous democratization of economic, social and political life. Socialism will constitute a higher phase of democracy and freedom: democracy realized in the most complete manner." ("Joint Communique", 1975, quoted by Roy, pp. 155-6). Marchais also unambiguously stated: "Our way to socialism is a democratic and peaceful one." (speech, quoted p. 262). Reflecting on Khrushchev's 1956 Statement, Togliatti even spoke of 'the possibility of the working people winning positions of power within the framework of a state, whose nature as a bourgeois state has still not changed, and... of a struggle to gradually remake this nature from within' (quoted by Roy, p. 156).

67. For recent developments, see "India Today", April 1-15, 1978, pp. 48-53, and April 16-30, pp. 10-1; "Left Unity: Long Haul", in "Mainstream", April 15, 1978 pp. 1-3; and "Whither Left Unity?", in "Southern Economist", April 15, 1978, p. 6.

68. Editorial, "Unbecoming Echo", vol XI, 1977, p. 2; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 204.



"Efforts have to be more broadbased. There are in India today, besides the Marxists and non-Marxist socialists, many large segments of society, committed to egalitarian, humanitarian and, hence, democratic, values and social goals. During the last ten years, many independent activist groups, oriented towards Marxism, have come into being... All these progressive forces have to be brought together in a common front. For this, a broadbased movement of *Activists for Democracy and Socialism*... has to be initiated.,<sup>69</sup>

If these guidelines are followed, the Indian masses and intelligentsia will progressively embrace communism. If not the communist parties will fail in their historical mission and continue to play a rather secondary role in Indian politics.

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69. "For a left Coalition of Activists for Democracy and Socialism", in MR vol X, 1977, p. 326,



## CONCLUSION

### What is to be Done

This booklet has unavoidably omitted several important issues such as major regional parties, Centre-State relationships, and the organization of the INC, the Janata and the CPs. It could also have described more at length the ideology and class character of these political parties. Yet, this booklet has analysed their essential characteristics and given enough material for further studies. The conclusion of each chapter has moreover so clearly voiced our stand that little needs to be added here.

Before expressing our views on "what is to be done", we like to repeat some of the conclusions of "Post-Independence Economic Policies" and link our political and economic analyses of India. In that booklet, we had thus summed up "the deep-rooted causes that explain the country's plight": "On the economic front, the means of production and the distribution system are in the hands of the rural and urban bourgeoisies which sometimes clash and sometimes unite to strengthen their respective class interests. The real political power, at different levels of the decision-making process, basically belongs to the same classes of society, which adopt a struggle-compromise policy towards the rest of the country... On the ideological plane,... the basic value-system of capitalism, with its emphasis on profit, ambition and competition, rather than on social gains and common good, also seems deeply imbedded in the modern Indian elite. The overall result is a certain trend of populism and socialism where the State lacks a strong political will to implement its decisions."<sup>1</sup>

To remedy such a situation, we also outlined the following measures: "Nothing less than a basic reorientation of the economy towards greater equality, social goals and authentic socialism, will enable India to fulfil her objectives of rapid economic growth and equitable distribution. Structural changes in the ownership of the means of production and the distribution system as well as in the class character and ideology of the decision-makers are absolutely required... India's experience shows that the most important task for the country's true progress lies in the proper education and organization of the urban and rural masses. Otherwise, the best programmes and policies will remain only on paper. As Nehru had pointed out in Lucknow in 1936, there is 'no way of ending the poverty, the unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism',

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1. pp. 95-6.



for 'some classes dominate the social order and exploit other classes'. Since 'a complete reconstruction of society on a new basis' means the diversion of profits and property from the haves to the have-nots, a certain amount of 'coercion or pressure is necessary to bring about political and social change'. The need is therefore great and urgent of building-up various political parties, trade-unions, and people's organizations, that will struggle from below for the implementation of socialist economic policies."<sup>2</sup>

Some readers might have been surprised by our clear, but critical, stand in favour of communism. One's political convictions ultimately depend on one's ideology. *If one agrees with us that only true socialism can bring about development and social justice in India, support to the communist movement is a must.* The ideology and class character of both the Congress and the Janata, which are expressed in their economic policies do not indeed permit any illusion on the possibility of achieving socialism through these parties. They also show how misleading is the talk of putting one's hope in the building-up of a two-party system in India. As we wrote earlier, "only a revolutionary/leftist government can solve the people's problems with socialist policies... This is why various people stress the necessity of a leftist alternative in the country".<sup>3</sup> In spite of its numerous mistakes, the communist movement is presently the only all-India political movement genuinely dedicated to socialism. Instead of being paralysed by their fear of communism and of dreaming of a completely new socialist movement, people of good will should therefore take this fact into account and collaborate with communist forces.

What has therefore to be done? Politics ultimately holds the key to India's problems. This—and the existing socio-economic and political situation—being understood, *one needs to do his utmost to build up the communist movement in the country and to orient it towards the type of guidelines and policies we have outlined. Though there is evidently no hope of an immediate communist take-over, one must patiently train leaders and politicize and organize the masses.* Every policy that brings relief to the oppressed, promotes people's participation and socio-economic equality, and truly strengthens democracy, should be supported. Old forms of struggles have to be perfected and new ones invented at all levels of political involvement.<sup>4</sup> In short, *one should positively build up the communist movement in India instead of criticizing past and present mistakes.*

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2. pp. 97-8. Nehru's quotations are taken from Bipan Chandra, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and the Capitalist Class, 1936', in EPW Special Number, 1975, pp. 1307-8.

3. See above p. 38.

4. Booklet 14, entitled 'Mass Movements and Mass Organizations', will give more details on this subject.



TABLE  
RESULTS OF LOK SABHA ELECTIONS 1951 to 1977\*

Parties	1951-52		1957		1962		1967		1971		1977	
	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II
INC	364	45.0	371	47.78	361	44.72	283	40.73	—	—	153	34.54
Cong(R)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	350	43.64	—	—
Cong(O)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	16	10.56	—	—
Janata/CFD	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	299	43.17
JS	3	3.1	4	5.93	14	6.44	35	9.41	22	7.48	—	—
SWA	—	—	—	—	18	7.89	44	8.68	3	3.08	—	—
CPI	16	3.3	27	8.92	29	9.96	23	5.19	23	4.89	7	2.82
CPM	—	—	—	—	—	—	19	4.21	25	4.97	22	4.30
SPs	21	16.14	19	10.41	18	9.33	36	7.98	5	3.41	—	—
DMK	—	—	—	—	7	2.02	25	3.90	23	3.80	—	—
Other Parties	44	16.4	34	7.57	30	7.37	20	6.15	30	9.84	51	9.15
Independents	41	15.8	39	19.39	20	12.27	35	13.75	13	8.33	7	6.02
TOTAL	489	100	494	100	497	100	520	100	515	100	539	100

\* Adapted from Sharda Paul, p. 236. I No. of seats won. II % of valid votes polled.



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## QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Describe the main characteristics of Indian politics since Independence.
2. Explain, in your own words, the ideology and class character of the Congress. How is this reflected in the party's policies? Are there any major differences between the Singh-Chavan and Indira Congresses? What is the future of these two parties? What contribution can they make to the building-up of the country?
3. Explain, in your own words, the ideology and class character of the Janata. Are there important differences between the Janata and the Congress parties? How do you see the future of the Janata? What contribution can the party make to the building-up of the country?
4. What lessons do you draw from the achievements and failures of the JP movement? Do you agree with our conclusion?
5. Describe the history of the communist movement in India. How do the CPI, CPM and CPI (M-L) respectively understand the Indian situation and the tasks at hand? How do you look at the stand and future of these parties? What contribution can the communist movement make to India?
6. Evaluate the seven guidelines we have outlined for the communist movement in India.
7. What, according to you, has to be done in today's Indian political situation?

## Acknowledgements

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John Maliekal



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